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ONFESSIONS
OF A
RIONET PLAYER

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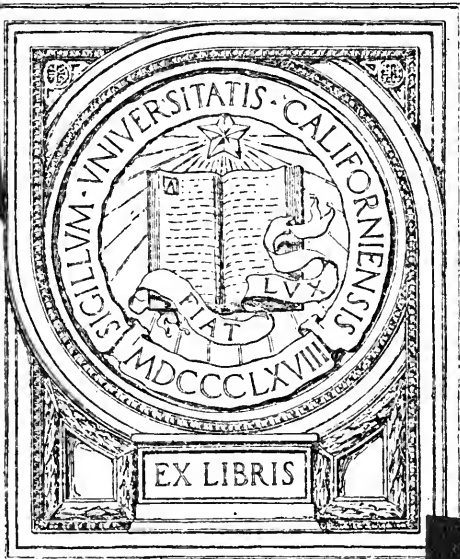
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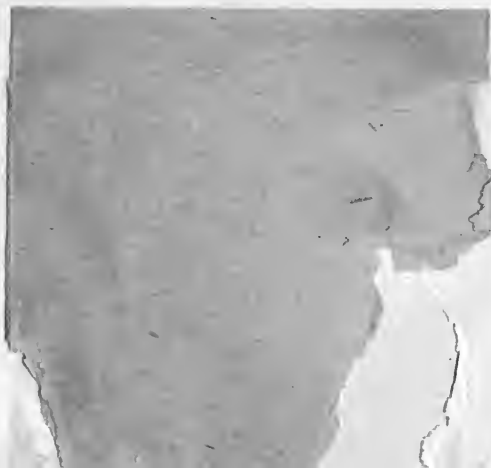


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"Ah Monsieur Rebstock, welcome."

CONFESSIONS
OF
A CLARINET PLAYER,
AND OTHER TALES.

BY
MM. ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN,

Authors of "Year One of the Republic," "Waterloo," "The Alsacian Schoolmaster," "Citizen Bonaparte," &c. &c.



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APPROVED TO THE
HONORABLE MEMBERS



CONFESSIONS OF A CLARIONET PLAYER.

CHAPTER I.



WHEN my uncle Stavolo purchased his fifteenth arpent of vines at the sale of the effects of old Hans Aden Fischer, in the year of grace 1840, and paid a thousand crowns hard cash for it to Bischof the notary, the whole village of Eckerswir was filled with surprise and admiration. Several people proposed to confer the highest civic honours on him, to appoint him burgomaster, or member of the municipal council; but others, more judicious, maintained that the place of sworn taster would be more in his line, seeing there was not in the whole country side a better judge of wines than Uncle Stavolo. He himself, however, attached but little value to these distinctions, and modestly replied—

“Leave me alone with your situations of burgomaster and municipal councillor. Thank goodness, I am now

free from all anxiety about my private affairs, and do you imagine that, at the age of fifty-three, I am going to get myself into a pack of troubles about public matters? No, no, put that out of your head. The place of sworn taster would answer me better, for it's always pleasant enough to drink a glass or two of good wine that costs you nothing; but thank Heaven my cellars are tolerably well filled with Rikevir and Kütterlé, and with Drahenfeltz of all qualities, so that I have no need to pick up alms, as it were; right and left, and poke my nose into my neighbours' wine-vats. Do you know what I intend to do from this time forward? I have no idea of walking up and down with my hands behind my back, as you may well imagine. I mean to cultivate my vines carefully and well; I intend to replace the old plants which have ceased to bear with young healthy ones, and those which are of indifferent quality with better, as far as I am able. I shall take a walk out on the hill-side every morning with my spade in my hand, and if I see any hurtful weeds growing I shall root them out; I shall tie up any branches that have got loose to their stakes—in short, I shan't want for occupation. Then I shall return home quietly and sit down to table with my daughter Margredel and my nephew Kasper; after supper we shall have a cheerful glass together, and Kasper will play us an air or two on the clarionet. In vintage time I shall sulphur my wine-casks and look after the vats—in short, in place of meddling with what doesn't concern me I shall attend to my own business. It isn't enough, my dear friends, to make money; you must also know how to keep it. How many people, in their anxiety to acquire honour and glory, have ended by leaving themselves without a farthing!

Oh no, my dear friends ; you intended to pay me a compliment, I know, but you took the wrong way. My proper place is not in the municipal council, but amongst my vines. I wish to be nothing more than plain Conrad Stavolo, and that I am already, by the grace of God."

Thus spoke my uncle, and every one saw that he was in the right.

Now all this plan of life that he had chalked out for himself he followed exactly, and not only did he cultivate and tend his own vines, but he put mine also in good order.

Ever since my mother's death I had lived with my uncle Conrad as one of the family, and, to explain matters to you exactly as they stood, I was in love with my cousin Margredel, and thought there was nothing in the whole world to compare with her flaxen hair, rosy, dimpled cheeks, and large blue eyes. Her little head-dress of black taffetas, her bodice with gold and silver spangles, her red skirt edged with velvet—in short, everything she wore seemed to me to become her so wonderfully that I often said to myself, "In the whole country round, from Munster to St. Hippolyte, there's not as handsome, as well made, as merry and good-natured a girl, as cousin Margredel."

Margredel, on her side, seemed to look upon me with an eye of favour ; at all the village fêtes she danced with no one else. We used to set off in the mornings in the waggon, seated on two bundles of straw, Fox and Rappel trotting away in front, Uncle Conrad driving, and all along the road we did nothing but talk and laugh. Even to this day, when I think of these little journeys, of our arrival at the Golden Pitcher, in the market-square of Hunevir, and of our

merry dances, it seems as if I was all at once transported to some happier sphere. Uncle Conrad was well aware that I loved Margredel, but he thought we were too young to get married as yet.

“Kasper,” said he to me sometimes, “try and earn a little money by your music; go the round of the village—don’t miss a single fête. I am told that you are the best clarionet in all Alsace; that Waldhorn, with his cornet, and you, are equal to a whole orchestra. It was Father Niklausse that told me that, and I fully agree with him. Well, when you have gathered up the wherewithal to buy two arpents of vines, my boy, I shall tell you something that will please you.”

And as he said this he looked at Margredel, who blushed and cast down her eyes, whilst I felt as if my heart would jump out of my breast.

You could scarcely believe how I loved Margredel. Often when I am alone, and dreaming with my eyes wide open, I fancy I am once more climbing the street of the village in those happy days. In imagination I see Uncle Conrad’s house, about half-way up the ascent, with its steep-roofed gable, notched like the teeth of a saw, standing out against the vine-covered hill behind. I see the little opening under the roof, where the pigeons are flying in and out, and turning somersaults in the air, or strutting about on the ledge outside, cooing and puffing out their breasts; I see the two little windows of Margredel’s sleeping chamber below, with their neat glazed earthenware pots of pinks and mignonette; I see Margredel herself stationed there watching for my approach, without moving. She fancied that I did not see her, but I did see her, and I felt as happy as a king. I grasped my clarionet tighter,

I drew myself up, buttoned my coat tightly, tossed my hair back from my forehead, and walked briskly forward, that she might think within herself, "Cousin Kasper is by far the handsomest young man in the village."

And when I ran up the steps, casting a look, as I passed, into the sitting-room, I saw her already busy laying the cloth, and arranging the plates and glasses on the table. She had tripped downstairs like a bird, not wishing to appear as if she had seen me coming, but I felt so happy, for I saw she had been expecting me, and I said to myself, "She loves me!"

"Oh, you are there, Kasper?" said she; "I thought you were still on the road this morning."

"Yes, Margredel, here I am," replied I, hanging my knapsack on the back of the arm-chair, and laying my clarionet on the window-seat; "I have just come from Orbay," Kirschberg, or whatever other of the villages in the neighbourhood it might be.

"You must have made great haste?"

"Yes, I came as fast as I could."

Then we looked at each other. She smiled, showing her little white teeth. I attempted to snatch a kiss, but she always managed to escape me, exclaiming—

"Kasper, Kasper, here is my father coming!"

Then she ran into the kitchen, and almost always, when I looked towards the street, I saw Uncle Conrad, with his broad shoulders, black felt hat, and grey jacket, returning from his vineyard. All these things I think I see before me still; I feel as if I were living that part of my life over again. Why is it that these happy days of our youth pass too quickly, and yet that we never can forget them?

I had the greatest respect for Uncle Conrad, and loved him as if he had been my own father, in spite of his harsh voice and manner when he was in a bad humour, and especially when he got downright angry. The last did not often happen, but when it did it was something terrible to see; his great hooked nose curved like an eagle's beak over his tight-pressed lips, his grey eyes darted fire, and his voice rang like the trumpet of the destroying angel. He never raised his hand, knowing himself his extraordinary strength, and fearing to do some terrible injury if he gave way to his anger.

Once, however, at the auberge of the Three Roses, where we had gone in the evening, as we usually did, to drink a bottle of wine in company with the vine-growers of Eckerswir, I saw him fly into a passion and turn quite pale, owing to a dispute about a particular way of planting vines. Old Meriâne asserted that the plants of the tokayer ought to be bent a little in the furrow to make them grow well, while Uncle Conrad maintained that they should be planted quite straight. At last Meriâne said that Uncle Stavolo knew nothing about vines, and that he wouldn't know a plant of tokayer from one of Drahenfeltz. Uncle thereupon got angry, and, striking his fist on the table, the glasses, tankards, and bottles leaped nearly to the ceiling. He had started to his feet, shouting in a voice of thunder—

“Come on, you others, let me see which of you will support Meriâne in what he says. I don't want to have anything to say to him; but the rest of you I will meet—three, four, ay, six to one!”

He looked round the room; no one moved. Then I knew that Uncle Conrad was the strongest man in all the country; I saw it with my own eyes. I had

heard indeed before that, that Mr. Stavolo, in his turn, had thrown all the village Herculeses who had made their appearance in the various wrestling-matches through the country, and that, even a few years before, he had challenged one Diemer, a woodcutter, who was called "The Oak of the Vosges" by reason of his extraordinary strength, and, at the first trial, had laid him flat on his back. Yes, I had heard that, but with us at home he had always shown himself so reasonable, and was so much in the habit of saying that brute force signified nothing, and that no one ought to boast of his strength, and while he said this he had stroked his chin with such a meek and saintly air, and seemed so penetrated with the truth of what he said, that I ended by believing him on his word, and looking on him as one of the most pacific of human beings. He was constantly repeating to me—

"Kasper, if you should ever happen to get into a dispute, do you know what I would advise you to do?"

"No, uncle."

"Well! As the Creator has given you a pair of long legs, make for the door at once, and take to your heels. As you haven't much more strength than a hare, the first blow would lay you sprawling on the ground, and the fight would go on over your prostrate body. Prudence, my boy, prudence is what I recommend you; it is the chief virtue of a clarionet-player who looks forward to getting married."

How could one suspect for a moment, after such judicious advice, that my uncle Conrad wasn't himself the most prudent of men, or that he could possibly care for anything except his vines, a glass of good wine, and a little cheerful music? But on this day that

I speak of I saw plainly that he was proud of his strength, and I was no little surprised at it.

However, having calmed down almost immediately, he made a great many excuses to old Meriâne, saying that he had spoken in this way only to see if, amongst all the young men who were present, any one of them would have courage enough to face his grey hairs. After which Father Meriâne admitted that Uncle Conrad was a good vine-grower, and a first-rate judge of plants of all kinds, as well as of farming and wine-making, fermentation, the preparation of vats—in short, of everything. He even said so much, and bestowed so many praises on Uncle Stavolo, that the latter was quite appeased, and replied, smiling, that Meriâne went too far, that no one could ever know the cultivation of vines thoroughly, that the more one learned on the subject the more there remained to learn, and that as experience was by far the safest guide in this as in other matters, the young should never boast of their knowledge in the presence of men like Father Meriâne, who was so much older and wiser.

So that, at last, both became affected, and towards eleven o'clock, when the watchman came to warn us that it was time to go, they were embracing each other, and calling each other the best vine-dressers and the worthiest fellows in all the country round as far as Thann, and even farther. And the feeling was so contagious that all the company became affected in like manner. And this is the way I came to know that Uncle Conrad did not really despise physical force as much as he pretended to do, in order to acquire a reputation for wisdom and discretion.

CHAPTER II.



OW, this year, towards the end of summer, Uncle Conrad had a cow ready to calve. She was the handsomest cow in Eckerswir, a large cream-coloured animal of the Swiss breed, and a first-rate milker, called Roesel. For a week previously, Hirsch, the veterinary, had called to see her every day, and each time had said, "She will calve to-morrow."

In the interval the anniversary of the fête of Kirschberg came round, where we were in the habit of going every year to dance and drink kirschwasser. This year the yield being very abundant of all kinds of fruits—black cherries, plums, mulberries, and myrtilles—every one who had been at Kirschberg brought word that the trees on the slopes around the town, and even to the margin of the forest, were so thickly covered with plums, that they had to be propped up to prevent them breaking. They told us also that at Father Yeri-Hans's farm they were busy distilling night and day, that they had found means to do without retorts by passing the vapour through huge barrels hooped with iron, and other stories of the like kind. Every one thought, therefore, that the fête would be magnificent, which annoyed us very much to hear, for we saw plainly, Margredel and I, that Uncle Conrad would scarcely be able to leave home. At last he himself took us aside in the sitting-room, and said—

"It's plain we can't go to the fête at Kirschberg this year. The veterinary tells us every day, 'It is sure to be to-morrow,' and, under these circumstances, I could

not think of leaving Roesel. No, I couldn't bring myself to leave an animal that cost me a hundred crowns, and that gives six pails of milk morning and evening, to the care of no one but Hirsch and the servant-maid; I shouldn't have an easy moment over yonder. Listen to me, my children: we will go to the fête of Wintzenheim instead. It comes off in about a fortnight, and we can enjoy our kirschwasser as well at the auberge of the Red Ox as at the Golden Pitcher, indeed better, as the kirchwasser is older there."

"You are quite right, I am sure, father," replied Margredel with rather a melancholy air.

And the matter was arranged in this way; we remained at home whilst the half of Eckerswir went to Kirschberg. Nothing was to be seen but spring-waggons setting off with their four, five, and six trusses of straw, in which were seated the townsfolk in their gala dresses, the hats and bonnets streaming with ribbons, and the girls with strings of beads twisted in their hair. We sat at the window watching them in a melancholy mood; and the young girls as they passed called out to Margredel—

"Hey! Margredel; aren't you coming? Make haste, put on your handsome skirt; we have still room for you."

"Thank you," replied Margredel; "I can't go to-day. Some other time."

And the young men shouted to me—

"Come, Kasper, get your clarionet; come along. You can ride Schwartz, can't you? Be quick—don't lose time."

And I shook my head.

Uncle Conrad was in the little garden behind the

house, busy propping up the branches of the fruit-trees, so as to be out of the way of seeing these things. This state of matters lasted till towards ten o'clock, when by degrees everything became silent again. The village looked quite deserted; no one was to be seen, except one or two old people sitting before their doors in the sun. Even the dogs had followed the waggons, and were no longer heard barking about the village as usual.

During dinner Uncle Stavolo kept saying that there was sure to be a great crowd at the fête, that there wouldn't be room to turn round, and that the innkeepers would certainly take advantage of this to get off their worst trash of wine and their mouldy cheese. He also insisted that we should be much better off at Wintzenheim with Father Michael Bloom, an old comrade of his, who had invited him a long time ago to go and taste his kougelhof cake, and take a glass or two of his brimbelwasser. Then we went down together to the cowhouse to see Roesel; and he gave it as his firm opinion that she must calve very soon, and if it took place that night, we would set off next morning early for the fête; but the fact was that the thing dragged on till the Tuesday, and then it was too late.

Meanwhile, in the evening of the same day, after supper, Uncle Conrad, who seldom smoked, and never anything but the tobacco which he grew himself in the garden behind the house, took a little boxwood pipe with a tulip-shaped bowl, and putting it into his waistcoat pocket, said to me—

“Come Kasper, we'll go and see what is going on at the Three Roses. I am sure that a good many of the neighbours have returned by this time from the fête. There's old Bremer, Meriâne, and Zapheri, who haven't

slept out of their own houses for the last thirty years. They never remain for the second day. If anything happens in the cowhouse, Margredel, send Orchel for me at once."

We left the room together.

When going downstairs, my uncle added—

"I confess I'm curious to know how they enjoyed themselves at the fête. However, we shall hear all about it."

We turned into the silent street, and after a few minutes' walk entered the great *salle-à-manger* of the Three Roses.

Uncle Conrad was not mistaken. Already a good number of the old folks had returned, and were sitting there smoking, with their elbows on the table, and giving an account of anything remarkable which they had seen during the day, reminding each other that in such and such a year—ten, twenty, or thirty years before—the fête of Kirschberg had been much finer; for instance, when Charles X. passed through the town, on the arrival of Maria Louisa in France, or in the time of Saint Just, when the great poplar tree was planted in the centre of the village. They lamented that everything was growing worse from day to day, that the young people had no longer the same life and spirit as formerly, that taxes were growing heavier, that the *kirschwasser*, the wine, the beer, the flour, the butcher's meat—in short, everything cost more than it used to do, that there was no saying when this state of things would end, and that it must be the abomination of desolation foretold in the Sacred Scriptures.

The old registrar of the *mairie* especially, Father Bremer, with his bag-wig carefully combed up on the

top of his head, and looking like a fur skull-cap, and his great Ulm pipe quite black with use, from which he drew a long puff about every half-hour—Father Bremer was in a sombre mood as usual, and with his two elbows on the table and his head resting on his hands, was looking steadfastly into his glass, and discoursing about bygone times.

Uncle Conrad and I took our seats along with the rest. Zapheri Mutz, the innkeeper, brought us a bottle of wine and two glasses, asking us at the same time if Roesel had calved yet. Uncle replied that she had not, and then we listened to what was going on.

Until ten o'clock nothing was talked of but the fêtes of Kirschberg of previous years, and especially of the last one. In opposition to the greffier's opinion, many of the company maintained that on no former occasion had there been a greater concourse of people or more dancers of both sexes; that the Madame Hütte had swarmed with them like a hive of bees; that old Yeri-Hans, having been guaranteed a sum of two hundred crowns from the games, had reconstructed the building with new planks, and had provided new flags and banners, and put rows of benches all round the hall—a thing every one must approve of, since it is only right that the grandfathers and grandmothers should have a comfortable seat from which to watch their grandsons and granddaughters dancing. They said also that the kirschwasser had a very fine flavour, that the vines promised well, and that the games of rampe, skittles, cock, and sheep had already covered Yeri-Hans's expenses.

From this they went on to talk of this thing and that, of the young men, the new fashion of tulle bon-

nets that Soffayd Kartiser had brought from Strasbourg, along with shoulder-of-mutton sleeves, and the hair arranged in a cross on combs half-a-foot high. The old greffier pronounced the former fashions of the Kirschberg infinitely prettier—the velvet toques with broad ribbons, the flat sleeves, the satin bodices embroidered with gold, the broad-striped silk petticoats, the long plaits of hair falling down behind to below the waist—in short, all the o'd fashions, from the three-cornered hat, scarlet waistcoat, and round-toed shoes with silver buckles, to the grey jacket of the miller and the white apron of the cheesemonger, seemed to him much handsomer and more becoming than the blouse and the cotton cap.

But these things had no interest for Uncle Conrad, who yawned behind his hand, and could scarcely keep his eyes open.

"Listen to me, Mr. Bremér," cried old Meriâne all at once; "you are quite right in a great deal of what you say. Yes, I admit that the old gowns and the old head-gear were much prettier than the hair dressed in a cross and the grey sarraux. I even go farther and say that the choucroute and bacon were much better formerly, because they smoked the meat more carefully, and in place of using a wooden screw to press the choucroute, they put a large stone on the top, so that the stone kept always pressing it down, whereas, now-a-days, when you forget to turn the screw, the choucroute spoils in the cellar. I am of your opinion as regards all that, but nevertheless there are some points in which the young folks are fully equal to us."

The registrar shook his head.

"You may shake your head as much as you please,"

said Meriâne ; “ what I say is true. Thus, for example, as regards wrestling, and all sports which require strength and agility, I ask you frankly, did you ever see a stouter or better made man than Yeri-Hans’s son, the young fellow who has just returned from Africa ? I venture to say he could knock down an ox with a blow of his fist. I ask you again, did you ever see such a Hercules in our time ? ”

The registrar seemed to be reflecting. Uncle Conrad fidgeted on his seat. He coughed as if about to reply ; but he remained silent, and old Meriâne added—

“ That tall artilleryman, I tell you, Bremer, wouldn’t be afraid to face any six men you could find—I mean ordinary men, of course, not such as Master Stavolo here—no, that would be going too far ; but I maintain that we have never had in our time any man who could compare with him as regards bodily strength.”

Then Meriâne emptied his glass, and Uncle Conrad asked with an air of indifference—

“ What artilleryman are you speaking of ? There have been strong men in every age of the world, but I must say I am rather surprised that I never heard of this artilleryman before.”

“ Why, he is the son of Yeri-Hans, the farmer, near Kirschberg ! ” said Meriâne,

“ Oh, yes ! now you mention it I remember—a tall, thin young chap, about six feet high—fair complexion with red cheeks—a regular thread-paper of a man. Yes, yes, Yeri’s son,” continued my uncle, twirling his thumbs ; “ and so you tell me he is wonderfully strong ? Well, I should never have thought it—that surprises me not a little.”

“ He was tall and fair-complexioned before he went

to Africa," said Meriâne, "but at the present time he has rather reddish hair, Master Stavolo, his skin is as brown as a berry, and his shoulders—why his shoulders are as broad as that," said he, holding his hands wide apart with an air of admiration.

"Length doesn't make strength," said Uncle Conrad, tossing off his glass abruptly. "Hans! a chopine! No, the height of a man proves nothing as regards his strength; I have seen very tall men who weren't at all strong. When any one speaks to me about strong men, I always ask, 'What have they done?'"

"It's easy to see that you were not at the fête, Master Conrad!" replied Meriâne; "if you had been, you would have known that nothing else is talked of through the whole country but Yeri-Hans's son, you would have known that he has thrown every one who had the boldness to enter the lists with him."

"Who were they?" asked my uncle.

"Why, good gracious, I can't remember all their names, as you may suppose, but they were all strong men, the very pick of the country—vine-growers, wood-cutters, charcoal-burners, all Herculese in their way. They didn't stand a minute. In one second they were on their backs with their heels in the air. It would have made your blood run cold. What a man that Yeri-Hans is, to be sure!"

At first my uncle Conrad said nothing; he coughed slightly; then, taking his pipe out of his pocket—

"There are several kinds of vine-growers," said he, with a strange smile. "I am quite willing to believe that your tall artilleryman is a stout fellow. He has no doubt learned in the regiment some of those tricks that Munch the Barber told us about, which consist of

hooking your opponent's leg, or even in giving him a kick now and then on the head. Yes, yes, I have heard of such things in my time. The soldiers learn these tricks from each other, and then when they return home to their villages they challenge all sorts of weak folks, poor, lame, deformed creatures, who haven't a breath of wind in their body, and by this means they make every one afraid of them, and you hear people saying right and left, 'What a terribly strong man! What a wrestler!' But, good gracious, when men come to have grey hairs in their heads, they should think a little before they speak. Although I say this, you can easily understand, Father Meriâne, that I don't attach any importance to such matters; if your artilleryman is as strong as you say, so much the better for him. Strength doesn't prove that you have reason; the oxen are a good deal stronger than any of us, but all that doesn't give them an ounce of sense. At the same time to hear people talk in this way provokes me. I would be very glad indeed to think that Yeri-Hans was the strongest man in the world; his father is one of my oldest companions and friends; but after all people should reflect a little before they talk in this way before sensible men."

Having said this, Uncle Conrad lighted his pipe at the candle, and Bremer, the registrar, exclaimed—

"Look here, Meriâne, if I had to bet on one of the two, I shouldn't hesitate long between your artilleryman and Master Stavolo; old as he is, Master Conrad——"

But uncle interrupted him—

"What on earth are you thinking of, Mr. Bremer? I match myself against a young man! Some ten or twenty years ago, I don't say; it might perhaps have

got my back up to hear it constantly repeated that any one was boasting he was the strongest man in the whole country round. I would have liked to try that; but at this time of day it is too late. No, no, let him fight with some one else; let him turn up his sleeves to the elbows, I predict that he will find his master, but it won't be Conrad Stavolo."

"Oh, I'm quite sure, Master Conrad, that at your age you wouldn't think of getting into grips with a young man," said Bremer; "but, frankly, if it came to that I would bet on you."

Uncle smiled; but at that moment the watchman appeared at the door, and rapping his great cane on the floor, said—

"Gentlemen, it is eleven o'clock."

Every one rose and took the way to his own house.

On our way home, Uncle Conrad, who seemed thoughtful, resumed the subject.

"That old Meriâne is losing his head; he is just the same as he always has been for the last thirty years. Everything he sees is sure to be the finest thing in the world. If one man beats another, straightway he is the strongest man in the universe; if he gets the better of two, his like has never been seen in the world since the days of Adam and Eve. I can't bear to hear people exaggerating in this way. But here we are at home. Good night, Kasper; I only hope Roesel will come to the point to night."

"Yes, uncle. Margredel wouldn't be sorry, I can see, to have a turn or two in the waltz at Kirschberg. She looks a little sad about it."

I mounted to my bedroom, and Uncle Stavolo went to his.

CHAPTER III.



UNCLE CONRAD, not being able to leave the house on account of Roesel, took his way up to the pigeon-loft early the following morning. In passing my room he opened the door and told me to follow him. The pigeon-loft was in the very top of the roof, above the hay-loft, and required you to climb up a ladder to get into it. Uncle Stavolo had boarded it round by nailing planks to the laths and joists, and had taken the precaution of surrounding the opening with sharp-pointed spikes, to keep out the weasels and martens, as these carnivorous animals are very fond of blood. We entered; then, one after the other, and the pigeons knew us so well that they came and lighted on our shoulders. I was even in the habit of putting grains of wheat in my mouth, which they would fight and struggle with each other to take out with their bills.

Uncle visited all the nests; then, suddenly going to the window, he leaned out, looking round at the hills of the Freeland, Mittelweicer, and Kiensheim, all thickly covered with vines as far as the eye could reach. He remained for a length of time leaning out of the window, and the pigeons, no longer seeing the daylight, began to spread their wings over their young ones. At last I said to myself—

“What on earth can uncle be looking at there?”

He was looking at his vines, which he had not been able to visit for the last three days.

At length he came away from the window, and said, in a cheerful voice—

“Kasper, if this weather lasts for six weeks longer, we shall have what may be called a year rich in all the productions of the earth. There is now no fear of the vines, the grain is forming in the ears, and all that is wanting now is the heat of the sun’s rays, which contain within them a peculiar virtue. The sun’s rays may be said in some sort to form the very life of men and plants, and this year they have more virtue than usual, owing to the comet. Yes, we shall have a famous year, and I am right well pleased that I didn’t sell my spare cocks, notwithstanding the high price that Meriâne offered me for them. The folks on the top of the mountain will have no cause to complain either, for there fell an abundance of rain in the spring, which helped on the potatoes and put body in the grain. Look up there at the very top of the hill, and these yellow patches among the pines; these are the oat-fields of Pelsly, the Anabaptist; he has one field of six arpents. And there, lower down, under the shadow of the Reethal, these great brown squares which you see are Turckheim’s potatoes. The stalks are beginning to wither on account of the great heat, but they can’t take any harm now, as they are full-grown. In short, every one ought to be contented and happy, for the Lord has poured down His blessings richly on the whole earth. Let us go down again, Kasper, and take care to shut the door carefully after you, to prevent the weasels getting in.”

Then he descended the ladder backwards. I followed him through the darkness, after shutting the door and shooting the bolt. When we reached the hay-loft below, uncle, laying his hand on my shoulder, said to me, laughing—

“This is all the more reason, Kasper, why you should take to the road, and not let your clarionet be idle. The better the season the more open-handed the people will be. They won’t think twice about spending a couple of groschen, nor double that either. Try and earn some money, try and make up your two arpents of vines this winter; with the three you have, and mine, it will be no bad beginning of your housekeeping. Hey! my lad, remember that youth is the time for work.”

Then I felt thoroughly happy, for in speaking in this way, Uncle Conrad evidently alluded to my marriage with Margredel. He then went down into the yard, and from my window, which looked in that direction, I saw him enter the great shed, go up to the rows of pipes and hogsheads, examine the hoops carefully one after the other, then stop for a few minutes afterwards with folded arms before the wine-press. Lastly, he opened the door of the cellar to the right, and I heard him knock on the empty barrels with his knuckles, the sound echoing through the vaulted roof.

The sun was shining down brilliantly.

Twelve having struck, I went down to the *salle-à-manger*, where I found Margredel in the act of laying the cloth. Then I told her what her father had said, taking her hand as I did so. She cast down her eyes, but said nothing.

“Ah, Margredel!” I exclaimed, “I fully believe you love me; but if you would only tell me so I should be the happiest fellow in the village.”

Then she replied in a low, soft voice—

“Why should I not love you, Kasper? Doesn’t every one respect and like you? Are you not one of the most——”

"No, no, that is not the answer I want you to give me, Margredel; all I want you to say is, 'Kasper, you are the one whom I love!'"

"Why, Kasper," said she, opening the door of the kitchen, "you are never satisfied."

As uncle was just then coming along the passage, I hadn't time to say much more. He entered the room with a grave, deliberate air, and, taking his seat, he spread out his napkin over his knees, although Margredel had not yet put anything on the table.

"It is wonderful," said he, looking out at the women passing our windows with great panniers on their heads; "it is really wonderful to see what numbers of people are returning from Kirschberg! Ever since morning it has been nothing but one stream of hampers of plums and casks of kirschwasser."

Just then Margredel entered, and placed the smoking soup-tureen on the table. I took my seat beside her, and uncle helped us to soup; then Orchel brought in the dish of choucroute, with a small piece of boiled bacon on the top. Uncle Conrad helped us each to a portion, and ate his in silence. No one was thinking of anything in particular, when, towards the end of dinner, raising himself in his chair, he exclaimed—

"There is nothing talked of everywhere but this artilleryman. Just now I heard two old women passing along the holly lane behind the cart-shed saying to one another, 'The artilleryman did this!' 'The artilleryman did that!' It's astonishing! it's really astonishing!"

I then saw that he was still thinking of what Father Meriâne had told us the evening before at the Three Roses, and this surprised me no little, for Uncle

Conrad wasn't in the habit of thinking of anything but his own affairs, and never troubled his head about other people's business.

Margredel also appeared surprised.

"What artilleryman are all the people talking about?" said she.

"Why, that tall Yeri-Hans, who has just come home on furlough," said he; "he gives out that he is the strongest man in all the country."

"The son of old Yeri of Kirschberg? Oh, I know him well," said Margredel, with an air of great animation. "A tall, handsome young fellow, with fair complexion and very light hair, isn't he, father? I remember so well how he looked when I saw him at Kirschberg, seven years ago, the first time you took me to the fête. He was dancing in the Madame Hütte, and every one was saying, 'What a handsome young fellow! How well he dances! There's not in the whole village the equal of old Yeri's son as a dancer.' I was very young, of course, at that time, and kept behind backs with Aunt Christine, but I would have liked right well to dance all the same; my feet were going pit-a-pat with eagerness. I looked on at every one amusing themselves, but no one seemed to think about me. All at once Yeri, who was walking round the hall, saw me, and immediately stopped, crying, 'Make room there! make room!' I had no idea what he meant. Then, as the neighbours turned their heads to see what was the matter, he came up to me, saying, 'Why, Miss Margredel, can it be you? Then Master Conrad is here, I suppose? I never once saw you. But, good gracious, why are you not dancing?' 'What are you thinking of?' cried Aunt Christine; 'she is still

far too young, Mr. Yeri.' 'Too young! She is quite a grown-up young lady, and the prettiest in the whole fête too; I hope she will take me for her partner!' Then he caught me by the hand, and led me out into the floor, and the music struck up again. Good gracious! how we did dance that night, till two o'clock in the morning! All the other girls were jealous. I shall remember it all my life!"

Thus spoke Margredel, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks flushing up as she thought of these things. But whilst she spoke I felt a pang shoot through my heart, my spirits sank, and I could not utter a word. Uncle Conrad also was silent, and seemed in a brown study.

"And so Yeri has come home again!" continued Margredel; "he doesn't remember that, I am sure; but no matter, he made me spend a very happy evening all the same. It was my first dance!"

"Well, yes. It is just that tall fair youngster that every one is talking of," replied uncle. "I don't say he isn't strong; I only say they shouldn't place him above the whole universe. If I was a young man, that shouldn't go on. Fortunately, Kasper, at all events, is prudent; he'll never seek a quarrel with folks of that kind. But every one looks at these things in his own way, and I shouldn't be the least surprised if, in the long run, some stout fellow like Polack, the charcoal-burner, of Hartzberg, for example, or Diemer, the woodcutter, of Schneethal, may get tired of hearing all this boasting, and one fine morning may take him quietly by the collar, and lay him under the table. Yes, that will very probably happen to Yeri; and a right good thing it would be too, for it was quite too

much what old Meriâne said yesterday—altogether too much."

Then Uncle Conrad rose, clapped on his broad-brimmed hat, and took one or two turns up and down the room, his lips tightly pressed together. I was quite pleased at what he had said. Margredel cleared away the plates and knives and forks, and folded up the tablecloth in silence. When matters had gone on in this way for some minutes, Orchel ran in, exclaiming that Roesel was just going to calve.

Instantly everything else was forgotten in this interesting announcement; Uncle Conrad took off his jacket, and said to Margredel and me—

"You had better stay here. You would only be in the way. Follow me, Orchel. When all is over you can come too."

They left the room, and immediately Margredel asked me why her father was so angry with Yeri-Hans. I told her it was on account of his extraordinary boasting; that this tall artilleryman was always bragging, since his return from Africa, that he was the strongest man and the prettiest fellow in the whole county, and that the girls couldn't help falling in love with him.

Margredel listened without making any reply, and when I had done she hurried away with downcast eyes to the kitchen to wash up the plates and dishes.

Half-an-hour afterwards, Orchel having come in to tell us that Roesel had calved, we went down to the stable together, where we saw the pretty creature licking her calf with such a tender, affectionate look, and Uncle Conrad, in high spirits, exclaiming—

"Now that it is over, I think nothing of the trouble

I have had. In five or six years we shall have none but the Swiss breed ; it is much the best. As the calves increase I shall get rid of the old beasts."

Margredel and I were struck with admiration and surprise to see the little thing already busy at its mother's teats. It was really extraordinary at that age, and even uncle himself said—

"Let people prate to us after that about animals having no reason! Where is the infant that could stand straight up the moment after it was born? Which of them could take the breast of itself, and look round at the folks, like this little animal?"

He was loud in his praises, too, of the beauty of the calf, its size, and the square well-formed knees and flat legs. Orchel had a basket on her arm, and was sprinkling it over with salt to induce Roesel to lick it.

During the rest of the day nothing was talked of but this important event. Every one was in high spirits, and until evening the door of the stable was left open, to allow the neighbours to flock in and admire the pretty little animal. There were always three or four at a time in front of the crib, and Unele Conrad, stationed in the centre of the group, was never tired of pouring forth eulogiums on the Swiss breed of cattle, and explaining that whether for work, the richness of the milk, or the quality of the meat, they had not their equal on earth.

Every one envied us, and evening having now come, we drank a good draught of Kütterlé to Roesel's health, after which every one went to bed, Uncle Conrad having had enough, he said, of the foolish gossip of the Three Roses, and the senseless remarks of Father Meriâne.

CHAPTER IV.



THE following day, which happened to be the Wednesday of the Kirschberg fête, Uncle Conrad went off very early to pay a visit to his vines. The weather was superb; and when I came downstairs, about seven o'clock, the three windows of the *salle-à-manger* were open, and Margreder, with the house-brush in her hand, was talking on the steps outside with little Anna Durlach, tall Berbel Finck, and three or four others of her companions who had returned from the fête.

"Oh! what a delightful time we had! How we danced! How we enjoyed ourselves! What a pity, Margreder, that you weren't there! There were young men from all the villages round—from Orbay, Turckheim, Trois-Epis, Ribauville, St. Hippolyte—from everywhere in short. Nickel is very angry because I took a turn or two in the waltz with Fritz, but I don't care a straw,"

And so on—and so on—chattering away like a flock of magpies.

All along the street nothing was to be seen but country carts unloading their cargoes of Kougelhof cakes, pâtés, sacks of plums, and casks of kirschwasser, children blowing their wooden trumpets, and farm-labourers unharnessing the horses and leading them off to the stables.

I was quietly seated at the table breakfasting by myself, and listening to what was going on on the steps, but without paying much attention, when all at

once the name of Yeri-Hans was mentioned, and as I listened, lo and behold, Margredel, who had been standing with her back to me for the last quarter of an hour, gave a glance into the room through the half-open door, stooping down a little as she did so, and the next moment all was silent. This didn't appear to me to be natural, and I said to myself—

“Why is Margredel afraid of them speaking of Yeri-Hans before me?”

All the morning this idea haunted me incessantly. I couldn't remain for a moment in one place. I would have given half of all I was worth to have heard that some one had broken three or four of this artilleryman's front teeth, or that he had got his nose flattened by a blow of the fist of one of his adversaries. I went about from one house to another, talking of the fête, and everywhere I was told that Yeri-Hans was the strongest man and best wrestler in all Alsace and the Vosges. What a misfortune it is to have to suffer in this way without any fault of your own!

At last, towards eleven o'clock, having returned to our own house, I saw Uncle Conrad coming up the street looking almost as melancholy as myself. He stopped from time to time to talk to the neighbours, which was contrary to his usual habit. Leaning with my elbow on the window-sill, I watched him coming along. Just as he came opposite the house there was tall Mr. Bastian, our schoolmaster, with his threadbare hat, his broad-tailed apple-green coat, garnished with metal buttons as large as cymbals, his short breeches, and immense square-toed shoes with copper buckles, descending the street with a majestic air.

Mr. Bastian was returning from the fête, his blue linen umbrella under his arm, and his nose in the air. He had been *throwing at the cock*, at the rate of three throws a penny, on the Thirmark, and as he had never yet met any one who could equal him as a marksman, Uncle Conrad naturally thought he had carried off the prize of the cock, as he had done in the preceding years.

Mr. Bastian was also looking very grave and serious; his immensely long legs were advancing with measured strides; he held himself as stiff as a ramrod, and when the children shouted to him in passing, "Good day, Mr. Bastian! good day, Mr. Bastian!" he made no reply, and gazed steadily upwards at the clouds.

"Hallo! Master Bastian; good morning to you," said Uncle Conrad. "How goes it with you?"

The schoolmaster, recognising the voice, lowered his eyes, and, hastily taking off his great broad-brimmed hat and bending low, he replied humbly—

"Quite well, Mr. Stavolo, quite well, with my dutiful respects."

Then Uncle Conrad, taking him aside into the recess in front of the steps, underneath the window, began as follows:—

"Come this way for a moment, Master Bastian; out of the way of the vehicles; I am always glad to have a chat with you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Stavolo, very kind indeed," said the schoolmaster, highly flattered at this speech.

They came close up to the foot of the stone steps, smiling.

"Well!" said uncle, "and how did the fête go off at Kirschberg, Master Bastian? You have just returned from it, have you not?"

"Why yes, Mr. Stavolo, as you see. It went off pretty well—pretty well on the whole—there were a good many people there."

"Yes, yes, the weather was favourable; that quite accounts for it. It's very natural. And how were the prunes selling?"

"At thirty-two sous the bushel, Mr. Stavolo."

"Good—very good! And the kirschwasser?"

"At twenty-four sous the litre, the first quality."

"Why, that wasn't dear—no, not at all dear."

Uncle Conrad was silent for a moment. I saw clearly that he was thinking of something, but I couldn't imagine what it was, when suddenly he asked—

"And you bore off the prize at the cock, as usual, I suppose, Master Bastian? But I needn't ask you—that's a matter of course."

At these words the schoolmaster reddened to the tips of his ears, his nose seemed to grow sharper and longer, he looked upwards, primmed in his lips with a little cough, and at last replied—

"Pardon me, Mr. Stavolo, I must acknowledge—my conscience constrains me to acknowledge—that, this year, I did not carry off the prize at the cock."

"What! How is that? You didn't win the prize at the cock?" exclaimed uncle, greatly surprised. "But who won it, then?"

Master Bastian had resumed something of his usual calm demeanour, the colour died away from his cheeks, and he said—

"It was a soldier—an artilleryman."

In a moment my uncle drew himself up to his full height, and squaring his shoulders, and holding his head high, exclaimed—

“What artilleryman?”

“His name, I think, is Mr. Yeri-Hans, junior; he is a young man belonging to the neighbourhood. Yes, he won the prize at the cock, and many other considerable prizes, Mr. Stavolo. We ought to render homage to the superiority of our competitors, and I consider that I am only fulfilling a duty in publishing my own defeat.”

Uncle Conrad was silent for a few moments; then, raising his voice—

“Ah! so he has won the cock! He throws well, then, this youngster?”

“Very well, very well indeed; I must admit it.”

Then, after a pause, apparently to collect his ideas, Master Bastian, his two hands resting on the top of his umbrella, behind his long flat back, his broad-brimmed beaver drooping on the back of his neck, and his eyes raised to heaven, resumed, in a melancholy tone—

“Yes, this young man has carried off the prize at the cock! I might diminish the force of my own defeat by lessening my adversary, but I shall not do so; I shall not imitate the deplorable example of those who think to raise themselves by lowering others. I may say, however, Mr. Stavolo, that I am not the first who has suffered from the reverses of fortune. I might quote, in ancient times, the example of Cyrus, conquered by a simple woman, after so many signal victories—of Hannibal——”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted uncle, “I know all that; but tell me, how did this happen? Was the play honourable and straightforward?”

“Quite honourable.”

Then Mr. Bastian, pulling an immense blue and red striped linen handkerchief from his hind coat-pocket,

wiped his forehead, down which the perspiration was dropping, and said—

“Towards half-past nine o’clock, when I arrived, the cock was already on his perch. In the first place, I saw that they had increased the distance by a toise and a half, which I measured myself, a very considerable addition indeed to the former distance, which was twelve toises. However, as the conditions were the same for all, I decided to compete. The cock had already been touched several times, but so slightly that all his feathers were still on. I remained looking on till towards eleven o’clock without taking any part in the competition.

“At that hour, Mr. Stavolo, I chose three stones, and touched the cock twice. This encouraged me, and up to three o’clock I had expended twelve sous, which makes eighteen stones, of which more than a fifth had touched; but this cock, being of the wild breed of the High Vosges, was so tenacious of life that the smallest drop of brandy set him on his legs again. At last, between three and four o’clock, I began to despair. The sum expended so greatly exceeded my usual custom and the value of the prize that I was for a time quite undecided how to act. I finally decided, however, to take three more stones, and with the third I so stunned the cock that he lay for more than a minute doing nothing but opening and shutting his eyes. All the company present were just proclaiming me victorious, when the young man of whom I have told you suddenly comes up. He opens the cock’s bill and blows into it, whereupon the bird awakens, as it were out of a dream, raises itself on its feet, and shakes its comb as if to make fun of the spectators. I was really in despair,

Mr. Stavolo; such a thing had never been seen in Alsace in the memory of man. Nevertheless, I still retained a sort of confidence that no other would succeed better than I had done, and this was the general opinion also. No person seemed willing to throw at an animal which had shown itself so rebellious against the fate which is reserved for us all, sooner or later.

“But this feeling seemed to have no weight with Yeri-Hans, junior. Without apparently taking any pains, he chose three sharp-cutting stones, portions of the bottom of an old pitcher, declaring that he would not exceed that number, and that if he did not kill the cock with these three stones, he would abandon it, without further interference, to its destiny.

“Every one looked on this as a piece of sheer braggadocio, and for my part, I said to myself, laughing, Mr. Stavolo—‘Here is another instance of the folly and presumptuousness of youth, puffed up with a sense of its own merits.’ Well, Mr. Yeri-Hans took off his artillery jacket, and threw his first stone, which struck about two lines below the perch, and with such force that all those present could see the mark. With the second he touched the cock, and knocked off so many of its feathers that it looked as if it was regularly plucked all over the right side. Every one thought the affair was at an end; but thereupon, in my turn exercising a just reciprocity, I blew into the cock’s bill, which staggered up on the perch, its nostrils full of blood. In this way the matter was left undecided; but with his third stone the artilleryman aimed so true that he cut off the cock’s head at the junction with the neck, and in consequence of this casualty it became impossible to revive it, either by pouring brandy down

its throat or blowing into its bill, seeing that the head was lying on the ground. This decided the victory."

During this narrative Uncle Conrad listened with an air of wonder and admiration. At last he said—

"Yes, that was neatly done. I have always thought that this youngster was much more adroit than most of the people about; but, after all, strength is strength, and no amount of sleight-of-hand can make a pine stronger than an oak. That's what I will always maintain."

"I ask your pardon, Mr. Stavolo," said the school-master; "this young man is as strong as he is adroit. In the same way that he won the prize at the cock so did he vanquish the strongest men in the country at the wrestling match."

"Who were they?" exclaimed uncle.

"Their number is incalculable," replied Master Bastian, puffing out his cheeks and raising his eyes to heaven; "but to mention only one. You know Diemer, the woodcutter of the Schnécethâl?"

"Certainly I know him," said Uncle Conrad.

"Well, Mr. Stavolo, he threw Diemer as if he had been a fly."

"He laid Diemer on the ground on his two shoulders?"

"Precisely; on his two shoulders."

"Why that, Mr. Bastian, if you saw it yourself, surprises me more than all the rest."

"I saw it, Mr. Stavolo."

"You saw it! But do you know the rules of the match? Did you observe if there was no crooking of the legs; if they caught below the arms, round the waist; if there were no feints or tricks?"

"I saw only one thing—viz., that Yeri-Hans caught

the woodcutter by the shoulders and threw him on his back; and then, as the other was about to commence again, he lifted him up suddenly and threw him over the palisade of the Madame Hütte as if he had been a sack."

"All these are only tricks," said uncle, who had turned quite pale. "But there's twelve o'clock striking. Thanks, Mr. Bastian; I must go in to dinner."

"I have the honour to wish you good day, Mr. Stavolo," said the schoolmaster, raising his beaver. Then he added, "Precisely as I have related the affair to you so it happened."


"Yes, yes," said uncle; "you saw nothing that you ought to have seen. But no matter; he is an adroit young fellow all the same, this Yeri-Hans."

And thereupon Uncle Conrad mounted the steps in a thoughtful mood, and Mr. Bastian proceeded down the street.

In the afternoon of the same day Waldhorn came to tell me that we were engaged to play at Lotchen Omacht's wedding, the daughter of the miller at Berghheim; that Zapheri, of Guebwiller, was to take the trombone, Cuckoo Peter and his nephew Mathias the double-bass and the violin, and myself the clarionet; that he would try to get a drum at Zellemburg, and, if there was none to be had, Brügel, the watchman, would willingly consent to take the part for three francs the evening.

We set out together at nightfall. And as the wedding gaities lasted for two days I did not get back to Eckerswir till the Saturday following, about ten o'clock in the morning. I had earned my six crowns, which naturally put me in good spirits.

CHAPTER V.

HEN returning along the Grand Rue, I could see already that Margredel was alone in the house. She was in the habit, when her father went off to his vines in the morning, of opening the windows of the large *salle-à-manger* to air the room, and just then the windows were wide open.

I ran on, therefore, with my clarionet under my arm, and my heart beating with pleasure, thinking to surprise her; but just as I was going to mount the steps, who should I see but Waldine the gipsy, with her long goat's face, her stump of a pipe between her blue lips, and her little Kalep, as black as a prune, in a sack on her back, coming down, her old shoes clattering from step to step, and she herself laughing and scratching her head.

Uncle Conrad couldn't endure this class of people; he always said gipsies were good for nothing but stealing and plundering, and carrying messages between the lads and lasses from house to house in secret, to earn a penny or two. When any of them happened to mistake the door and called on us, he shouted at them in a voice of thunder—

“Will you leave this, you pack of vagabonds? Begone this moment! You had better take care! There is nothing to be had here but good heavy blows of the stick!”

So they seldom or never ventured near us.

You may imagine, therefore, how much I was surprised at the sight of this woman. I said to myself—

"I'm certain she has been stealing something or other, no matter what—either hemp, or bacon, or eggs—from the kitchen cupboard, the more so that she is laughing."

I was so sure of this that I was just going to cry out, when she hurried down the remaining steps, and almost at the same moment I saw Margredel leaning out of the window, and looking after her with a pleased air. Then I kept silent, but I could scarcely tell you what a crowd of ideas passed through my head. Margredel, seeing me, drew back as if to go on with her sweeping up the room, and I entered, saying—

"Oh, good morning, Margredel; here I am back again, you see."

She seemed a little out of temper, and replied—

"Oh! it's you, Kasper; you weren't long away this time."

"Ah, Margredel, it's not kind of you to say that," exclaimed I, laughing, but all the while feeling very sad inwardly; "no, it isn't kind of you; it's plain you haven't thought the time long without me."

She appeared quite embarrassed at this, and replied after a moment or two—

"You are always seeing something to blame me for, Kasper. Every time we happen to be alone together, the first thing you do is to find fault with me."

"Well! have I no cause?" exclaimed I.

But seeing that, in place of excusing herself, she was walking away to the kitchen and leaving me standing there like a fool—

"See, Margedel," said I, "although you don't think about me, I can never forget you! Look here—I have just brought this for you."

And I handed her a magnificent blue silk ribbon which I had in my bag.

She opened the paper with a half-pleased, half-angry air, and when she had looked at the ribbon and saw that it was very pretty, all at once, smiling at me with tears in her eyes, she said—

“Kasper, you are a kind, good fellow all the same. Yes, yes, I do love you dearly!”

Then she kissed me—a thing which she had never done before. I felt somehow quite sad. I would have liked to ask her what the gipsy woman had been doing in the house, but I durst not venture. I only said—

“It pleases me to see that you like the ribbon, Margredel. All along the road I was fearing it would not be to your taste.”

“Yes, it is quite to my taste,” said she, going forward to the glass, and folding it in a bow underneath her pretty rosy chin; “it is really beautiful; you have gratified me greatly, Kasper.”

Hearing that, I forgot all the rest, and I asked—

“What did that gipsy woman want here?”

Margredel blushed up, and I saw by the expression of her eyes that she was a good deal agitated.

“Waldine?” said she.

“Yes, Waldine. What business had she here?”

“She is a poor woman, with her little child. I gave her some nuts. But it is time I was going to see how the dinner is getting on. There’s eleven o’clock; my father will be back immediately.”

And she hurried off into the kitchen. I mounted to my bedroom to lay aside my knapsack and clarionet, my mind running upon what had happened, and especially on Margredel’s agitation, and thinking to myself that

she had, perhaps, been having her fortune told, for as regards sweethearts, there were none in the village but myself. Every one knew that Father Stavolo did not understand joking on that subject.

This conclusion appeared to me a natural one, and I ended by thinking that I was wrong to feel uneasy, that Margredel only did as all other young girls do, and that she had good grounds to reproach me for my mistrust of her. This put me in good spirits again. At last, in about a quarter of an hour, as I was still dreaming about all these things, I heard Uncle Conrad's loud voice calling to me from the foot of the stairs—

“Hey, Kasper, come down to dinner. So here you are back again! What a handsome ribbon you have brought Margredel! You will ruin yourself, boy.”

I went downstairs, and uncle laughed so heartily that it made me too feel quite contented and happy. A huge omelette with bacon was already on the table. Whilst we were eating I told how the wedding at Bergheim had gone off, a subject which Margredel was never tired of listening to.

But towards the end of dinner, and just as we were going to rise from table, there comes a hotte and pannier up the steps in front of the windows, and then a knock at the door.

“Come in! Why, it's Mother Robichon and her son!” cried Uncle Conrad. “Good day, Mother Robichon, good day; it's a long time now since I saw you.”

It was Mother Robichon and her son Nicholas, the colporteurs, who carried the glass ware of Wildenstein about the country for sale. The old woman had her great pannier full of glasses, the männel gläser, which are sold in thousands all over Alsace, while Nicholas's

huge hotte, which towered above his head like a helmet, was crammed with bottles of all kinds. These honest folks were not sorry to sit down for a little, for it was very warm outside, and the road from Wildenstein to Eekerswir is rather a long one.

"Sure enough, Master Conrad, it is ourselves and no other," said the old woman. "We have come to see if you want any goblets."

"Very good, very good; sit you down, Mother Robichon; we will talk of that by-and-by."

He helped the old woman to put down her pannier, whilst I supported Nicholas's hotte on the edge of the table to allow him to take off his shoulder-straps. Then we propped the hotte up against the wall, and Uncle Conrad, who liked honest, industrious folks, cried out—

"Margredel, bring a couple of glasses; Mother Robichon and Nicholas will take a glass of wine with us. Sit down; bring forward your chairs here, near the table."

"You are very good," said the mother, taking her seat. "It's not a thing to be refused, a glass of wine, on a warm day like this."

Nicholas, with his blue and red striped cotton cap, his blouse, his grey linen trousers, and his thick hob-nailed shoes, all white with dust, remained standing in the middle of the room, not venturing to sit down.

"Come along, Nicholas, take a seat," said uncle to him, pointing to a chair.

Then he sat down.

Margredel brought the glasses, and uncle filled them to the brim.

"Your health, Mother Robichon."

“And yours too, and may God reward you!”

They drank, and uncle, who was in high spirits, began to talk of this thing and that; of the hardships of a pedlar's life, of its bad pay, the length of way they had to walk to earn their bread, &c. Then he inquired the price of glasses; how many each auberge would require, how much they made each journey—in short, he asked about everything which took place in Alsace, from Belfort to Strasburg, for it was his habit to question strangers in this way. He liked to know everything.

Mother Robichon sighed; she said the times were getting harder every day. Nicholas, with his two hands resting on his knees, and his shoulders bent forward, said nothing; only, from time to time, he gave a look at the bottle, and then Uncle Conrad filled the glasses again, which seemed to please him greatly, for his great thick lips parted in a broad grin, and he wiped his nose with the back of his sleeve, as if to prepare himself for a good long drink. But the old woman was not in a hurry, and he waited till she put forward her hand.

Meanwhile Margredel and I listened, pitying these poor people, and thinking what a hard life they led, summer and winter, as long as they were able to walk, and at the end nothing but poverty and suffering, notwithstanding all their pains. I blessed Providence for having given me a taste for the clarionet in place of Nicholas's hotte. At last, after beating about the bush for a long time, Uncle Conrad exclaimed—

“By-the-bye, Mother Robichon, you were at the fête at Kirschberg, of course?”

“Yes, Mr. Stavolo, yes, we were there. At the

fête of Kirschberg, look you, the kirschwasser and the myrtille brandy are the cause of more glasses and bottles being broken than at all the other fêtes in Alsace. We always arrive with our panniers full, and return to Wildenstein with them quite empty. Sometimes Nicholas carries a little cask of kirschwasser in his hotte for the gentlemen of Wildenstein, but not every year."

"Oh! so you were at Kirschberg," said uncle. "Tell me, did you hear any talk of a son of Yeri-Hans, an artilleryman?"

"Hear any talk of him!" said the mother, clasping her withered hands; "good gracious! I should think so, Mr. Stavolo, and plenty of that, too."

"Oh! very good. And is it all true that people say about him?"

"True! Mercy on us! That it is indeed. I couldn't tell you half of it. Why, that man, Mr. Stavolo, is more like what you would read of in ancient times. And a handsome man, too, a man——"

"Come now, Mother Robichon," interrupted uncle, "you slept in Mr. Yeri-Hans's, the father's, barn, I suppose, this year, as usual, and——"

The old woman guessed instantly what uncle would be at, and replied—

"As for that, Mr. Stavolo, we did sleep in Mr. Yeri-Hans's barn, but that is not what makes us speak as we do; no, what we say is the downright truth. A handsomer man, a better dancer, or a more good-humoured, kind-hearted fellow is not to be found in the whole country round than that artilleryman."

"I don't say anything to the contrary," cried uncle; "but——"

"I should tell you, in the first place," continued the old woman, "that when I arrived in the fair he knew me in a moment, and called out, 'Hallo! why there's Mother Robichon! Good day, Mother Robichon, I'm glad to see you. Always getting on well, I hope?' And he made me sit down, and poured me out a glass of wine. But more than that, if you'll believe me, he bought a great cake of gingerbread in the fair, half a pound weight, I'm sure, and gave it to me, saying—

"'Mother Robichon, do you remember once on a time, nearly eighteen years ago, when you used to come to the farm and bring me little aniseed cakes?' And it was the pure truth, Mr. Stavolo. At that time the poor child was quite pale and thin; Mother Yeri had no hope he would live, and I used to bring him spice cakes from Hospes', the apothecary's, that I heard were good for worms. And now, good gracious! to see what a man he is! What a handsome, fine-looking man! Ah, to see folks when they are children, you never know what they will turn out."

Thus spoke the old woman, scarcely giving herself time, in her eagerness, to take breath. Uncle Conrad seemed impatient. Margredel listened with lips half parted, and I looked at her, thinking, "How her eyes sparkle!"

The thought of the gipsy woman recurred to me in spite of myself.

"Very good," cried uncle; "I see, he gave you gingerbread. It was very kind of him, no doubt; it proves he is grateful. But why do the people say he is the strongest man in the world?"

"As for the world, Mr. Stavolo, I don't know. No,

I should say there must be many men as strong in the world; but the strongest man in all this country he certainly is."

"In all this country!" said uncle. "And what about Polak, the charcoal-burner, Diemer, the wood-cutter——"

"He laid them flat on the ground," interrupted the old woman.

"How do you mean? Who did he lay flat?"

"The charcoal-burner, Mr. Stavolo."

"The charcoal-burner was there, then?"

"Yes; he was the last he threw. Even after the thing was over they had to give Polak three large glasses of kirschwasser, owing to the exertions he had made. His knees were trembling, and his hands and shoulders too. They thought he was going to die."

"You saw that?"

"I saw it, Mr. Stavolo. Wasn't it so, Nicholas?"

"Yes, mother," replied the lad in a low voice.

Then Uncle Conrad, looking down at the table and whistling something or other through his teeth, said no more. So that Mother Robichon, after a minute or two, went on—

"And now that I think of it, Mr. Stavolo, he even spoke of you."

"Of me?" said uncle, raising his head.

"Yes; he said, rubbing his hands, 'Well, Mother Robichon, I have put them all under the table, but there's one left stronger than any of them—Father Conrad Stavolo. We must have a look into the whites of each other's eyes, and when I have laid that man on his back, without doing him any harm, be it understood, for he is a man I respect, I may cross my arms and wait

till some Hercules comes down from the North to meet me.' ”

While Mother Robichon was speaking Uncle Conrad's cheeks gradually contracted, his hooked nose curved fiercely, and his eyes darted half-suppressed glances of fire.

“He said that, did he?”

“Yes, Mr. Stavolo.”

“Scoundrel!” muttered uncle, endeavouring to restrain himself; “to speak so of a man like me—a man of my age—a man——”

“But,” cried the old woman, “he didn't mean to do you any harm.”

“Harm!” shouted uncle in a loud voice—“harm! Let him take care that Conrad Stavolo doesn't go in search of him. Harm, indeed!”

And raising his finger—

“Let him take care! To challenge a peaceable man—a man that has fought more than fifty battles——”

Here he rose to his feet—

“A man who has sent Staumitz spinning, the famous Staumitz of the high mountain, like a fly—yes, I sent him spinning! And Rochart, the terrible Rochart, who could carry twelve hundredweight; and Durand, the tall sawyer, who upset a bull by its horns; and Mutz, and Nickel Loos, and Toubac, the smuggler, and Hertzberg, the butcher, of Strasburg—all, all passed between my legs!” shouted he in a voice that made the window-panes rattle.

Then all at once he calmed down, took his seat again, emptied his glass at a draught, and said—

“I care no more for this artilleryman of yours than I do for a pipe of tobacco. May the Lord preserve

him from meeting me—that's the best wish I can give him. However, I can't stay here chattering all day like a one-eyed magpie. Whether Yeri-Hans is strong or weak is nothing to me. Margredel, give me my jacket. I am going to Reethal as arbitrator, to fix the boundary between Hans Aden and old Richter. It's now two o'clock, and the juge de paix will be waiting for me at the mairie."

Margredel, trembling like a leaf, went to get the jacket. Mother Robichon and her son shouldered their pannier and hotte again without saying a word, and uncle left the room as if no one had been there.

For my part I couldn't get over all these battles which Uncle Conrad had just now boasted of for the first time. It appeared that in his youth his ardour for the battle had led him to go distances of twelve or fifteen leagues, even as far as the Vosges Mountains, to challenge strong men, just for the pleasure of the thing; but now age had calmed him down. This is what I said to myself.

The Robichons, mother and son, wished us good day, and went away as they had come.

CHAPTER VI.



UNCLE CONRAD, on returning in the evening, said nothing more about what had happened. He took his supper quietly, and went to bed at an early hour, feeling fatigued.

I wasn't sorry either, after sitting up for two nights playing, to stretch myself on a comfortable bed. But

the next morning towards seven o'clock, as I was still sleeping, uncle awoke me.

"Get up, Kasper," said he, "we are going to Kirschberg to buy a litter of sucking-pigs from Mother Kobus. Her sow farrowed last week. I require six young pigs to put on the beech-mast and acorns; one doesn't get a chance of buying the like every day."

"Sucking-pigs to put on the acorns? You surely don't think of doing that, uncle?" said I. "Six weeks hence would surely be time enough; they would have teeth then; but——"

"I tell you I want these young pigs," replied he in a dry tone. "When one has two cows in full milk and plenty of refuse, they can rear six and even eight suckers, I should think. Besides, I am only going to choose them to-day. Mother Kobus will send them to me in a fortnight or so by Stenger, the carrier. So make haste, dress yourself, and come down."

"Immediately, uncle; only you are wrong to be angry with me. I didn't mean to contradict you."

"It's all right, I am not angry, only make haste."

Then he went downstairs, and whilst I was dressing I thought to myself, "It's rather odd, all the same, that uncle, in place of making butter from the cows' milk and sending fat Orchel to sell it in the market at Ribauville, as usual, wants now to rear young pigs with it. They will make choice meat, certainly." And, thinking in this way, I went down to the large salle. The waggon was already before the door, with the horses harnessed. Uncle Conrad had finished his breakfast.

"Take a drop of wine, Kasper," said he to me, "and put a bit of meat and a piece of bread in your knapsack. You can eat it on the road."

You would have thought it was a matter of life or death.

I saw also that uncle had put on his handsome grey camisole, his best beaver, his brown smallclothes, and woollen stockings, which gave him a very respectable appearance. He had pulled up the collar of his shirt above his ears, and I thought to myself, "Why does he need to be dressed in his Sunday clothes to buy pigs?"

As we were going down the steps, Margredel leaned out of the little window of the kitchen and called after us in her soft, gentle voice—

"You will be back before nightfall?"

"Don't be uneasy," replied uncle, helping me to mount on the truss of straw and taking his seat beside me. "Hi, Fox! Hi, Rappel!"

The waggon started off like the wind.

Uncle Conrad seemed thoughtful. When we were out of the village and galloping along between the two rows of poplars that line the road leading to Kirschberg, he said—

"I am going to buy a litter of pigs. It's a good season. The mast and acorns are ripening fast. I am going to the village of Kirschberg, as Mother Kobus told me a week ago that she had some young pigs to sell. We are going for that purpose. You understand, Kasper?"

"It's not hard to understand that."

"Just so. It's not hard to understand. That's just what I wanted to say. Hi, Fox! Hi, Rappel!"

And he gave the horses a cut with the whip.

Meanwhile I thought to myself, "Uncle Conrad must think me very stupid to explain things to me as if I was a child:—'We are going to buy pigs. It's a good

season. We are going to Mother Kobus's for that purpose, and for no other. You understand, Kasper?"

After a moment or two, he added—

"As for me, I am a man of peace and quietness, a respectable citizen of Eekerswir, going quietly to buy some young pigs in a neighbouring village. But if any one should seek a quarrel with him he will defend himself, naturally."

Then I looked at uncle, and said to myself, "Oh, ho! so this is why we are going to Kirchsberg!"

The sight of what he called his peaceable demeanour made my flesh creep. His shoulders were slightly stooped as usual, he was freshly shaved, and had on a clean white shirt, and so far, it is true, he had the appearance of a quiet respectable citizen; but on observing his hooked nose and keen grey eyes, I thought to myself, "Any one that attacks us will find himself very much mistaken; it will be a jolly good surprise to him." And all those stories of my uncle's battles came back to my mind. I couldn't help admiring him to myself, looking, as he did, the picture of an honest respectable country farmer, and a lover of peace. And as we were still galloping on, I said to him—

"Who do you think could want to attack us, Uncle Conrad? There are no robbers in the highways now-a-days."

"I only say *if* any one attacks us. You must acknowledge, Kasper, that it would be very ill done to insult a peaceable man like me, with grey hair, a father of a family, who only asks to pass quietly on his way, would it not?"

"Yes, uncle, it would be very ill done," said I. "Whoever tries it will repent of it."

“As for that, yes; it would be in self-defence, and a man, in that case, must do his best. One can’t let himself be sent head over heels without saying a word,” continued my uncle with an air of suffering innocence; “it would be rather too convenient that for messieurs the evil-doers. If honest men allow themselves to be ill-used, it would encourage the others in their evil ways, and at length they would think themselves all-powerful on earth because the others said nothing to them. Hi! Rappel!”

I now saw plainly that Uncle Conrad was going to Kirschberg expressly to be challenged by Yeri-Hans, and at first I was afraid of what might happen. I kept trying to think of some means to prevent this terrible encounter, for the tall artilleryman could scarcely fail to make his appearance at the Golden Pitcher when he learned that my uncle was there. Indeed, he was certain to do so, from what Mother Robichon had said. What was to be done? How could I prevail on my uncle to return?

I gave a glance at him now and then with the corner of my eye while thinking in this way. The waggon still galloped on. He looked so calm and collected, and spoke so fair, having withal such a quiet respectable appearance, that I couldn’t think how I was to manage it.

As I was puzzling my brain in this way, the idea occurred to me that Uncle Conrad might very possibly get the better of Yeri-Hans, and that then there would be open war between them. In this case the tall artilleryman could never show his face at Eckerswir for very shame, and would never ask Margredel to dance again. This idea inwardly delighted me. Then I

thought that if Uncle Conrad proved the weakest, that would be worse still. He could never endure to see Yeri-Hans again; he would abuse him like a pickpocket, he would forbid Margredel to mention his name before him, and would call him all the names he could think of—ragamuffin, scoundrel, &c. It was a wicked idea, I know, but what could you expect? I was in love with Margredel, and the idea that perhaps the gipsy woman had come with some message from Kirschberg made me very uneasy. I had hated Yeri-Hans like poison ever since Margredel had spoken of him having danced with her seven years before. In short, that's the way the matter stood. I conceal nothing—neither the good nor the bad. That is what I was saying to myself, then, and I thought also that, even if the tall artilleryman failed to come to the Golden Pitcher, uncle would despise him. So that in any case Margredel would never see Yeri-Hans again.

Far from wishing to prevent Uncle Conrad from going to Kirschberg, my only fear now was that he would have good sense enough to return to Eckerswir of himself, either from fear or some other motive.

Already I pictured to myself the tall artilleryman rolling on the ground, and I laughed inwardly at the idea. Such is the way that men's minds change about every moment, according as their interests lead them on one way or the other.

At last, towards eleven o'clock, the village of Kirschberg came into view on the side of the hill, surrounded with its orchards; Father Yeri-Hans's great farm-house, high up next the woods, and the smaller buildings, with their cartsheds, lining the road.

We neared it rapidly. The Green Tree alehouse,

and the straggling houses on the outskirts, separated from each other by lines of dunghills, were soon passed.

Uncle Conrad, at the sight of the Golden Pitcher, at a turn in the street on our left, whipped the horses, and at the same moment the diligence, crowded with conscripts in blue linen blouses and red trousers, passed us with a noise like thunder. It had just left the inn door, the porte-cochère being still open, whilst a number of other conscripts, substitute-agents, and men, women, and several young girls were standing in the road, waving their hands to the departing convoy, who in their turn waved their caps out of all the windows of the diligence. Some were standing on the top, gesticulating frantically, and singing with their mouths wide open from ear to ear, but the rumbling of the diligence prevented their voices from being heard.

It was in the midst of this hubbub that we entered the courtyard of the inn. The stable-boy came forward to take the horses. We got down from the waggon, and uncle, knocking the straw off his clothes, said to me—

“Come along, Kasper, we must have a bottle of raugen before dinner. After that we shall call on Mother Kobus.”

I followed him under the archway, and we entered the large salle, which was crowded with people. Some women were crying, with their aprons to their eyes, others were consoling themselves with a glass of white wine and munching bredstelles. The substitute-agents were gravely smoking their huge porcelain pipes, and Madame Diederich, with her great tulle cap and fat rosy face, was jotting down the reckonings on a slate behind the counter.

At first no one paid any attention to us; but when we had taken our seats near the window, in a corner to the right, Madame Diederich, seeing us, came up with a smiling air to bid Uncle Conrad good day. She asked him why he had not been at the fête, how Miss Margredel was, and if we were all in good health at home, &c. To which uncle replied in the same agreeable manner. Then Madame Diederich withdrew, and I heard several people about us whispering—

“That’s Mr. Stavolo, of Eckerswir, the vinegrower.”

And all along the tables the heads were turning to look at us. Gross, the wine-cooper, who was near the door, said in a husky voice—

“That man yonder is the strongest man in all Eckerswir—Mr. Stavolo; I know him very well. He wouldn’t be afraid of Yeri-Hans, I’ll warrant him.”

Uncle heard him saying this, and I saw by his face that it gratified him greatly.

Then the servant-maid having brought us a bottle of rangen and two glasses on a waiter, my uncle gravely poured out the wine.

“Your health, Kasper,” said he.

“To yours, uncle,” replied I.

A few moments afterwards the waiting-maid brought us some biscuits on a plate, for with persons of distinction, like Uncle Stavolo, it’s not the custom to bring in bread and cheese, but biscuits or macaroons, to do them honour.

Seeing these things, I began to think within myself that Yeri-Hans would never venture to challenge uncle and that, if he came, we should be able to look down on him, since people of consequence, like us, couldn’t be expected to get into grips with every chance comer.

I said to myself also that every one would be against this young man, so that we should actually reap the victory without ever having fought.

Thus, for the second time since morning, I had completely changed my mind, when all at once a tall artilleryman—his little cavalry jacket buttoned up to the chin and tightened in about the waist like a young girl's bodice, his pointed kepi, with turned-up peak, over one ear, and his grey linen trousers, cut very wide, with sunburned complexion, blue eyes, straight nose, large sandy-coloured moustaches, projecting ears—in short, a tall strapping fellow nearly six feet high, as solid as an oak—passed in front of the windows carrying a little hazel stick in his hand, which he twirled now and then with a knowing air, and followed by Gross, the wine-cooper, with his hands stuck in the pockets of his apron.

The next minute the door opened, and this man, without entering, put his head inside, looking up and down the room. Then he mounted the three steps, his hand brought up to his right ear in military style, and said—

“My service to you all!”

All the young men instantly called out—

“Yeri! hey! Yeri! This way! A glass here!”

He laughed good-humouredly, and walked along the line of tables, shaking hands right and left, and clapping the old people gently on the shoulder who were crying, saying to them—

“Come, come, Father Franz—come, Father Jacob! Don't take on this way! Keep up your heart! What the deuce! He will come back to you again. You see I came back—didn't I?”

At which the old folks shook their heads without replying, or else, hiding their faces in their wrinkled hands, murmured in a choking voice—

“Leave me alone, Yeri; leave me alone.”

It was plain, however, that this Yeri-Hans was a good-natured fellow; I couldn't deny it; but that only vexed me the more. I would have liked to be able to think him an ill-hearted scoundrel; and that Margredel when she saw him would hate the sight of him.

Uncle Conrad pretended to be lost in thought. He took out his pipe, and filled it slowly; then, in place of lighting it, he put it back again into his pocket, and said to me—

“What lovely weather we are getting now, Kasper!”

“Yes, uncle, very fine.”

“The grapes will be gaining up to the end of the month.”

“There's no doubt of that. They are gaining every day.”

“We shall have a hundred pipes at least this year.”

“It's quite possible, Uncle Conrad, and of good quality, too.”

“Yes, Kasper, it will equal that of 1822. It was a good little mild-flavoured wine, and sold at thirty-five francs the pipe three years afterwards.”

All the time my uncle was saying this he pretended to be looking at Martine, the blacksmith, on the opposite side of the street, shoeing a horse, with the hoof resting on his apron. I would fain have done so too, but I couldn't take my eyes off Yeri-Hans, who, on his side, did not appear to see us. At last Gross touched him on the shoulder, as I could see quite plainly; he did not turn round immediately, however, but went

on talking and laughing for a short time with a young girl who seemed much taken with him; then, swaying himself to and fro with a self-satisfied air, he turned gently on his heel and looked over in our direction.

Uncle Conrad, with his elbow on the table and his head leaning on his hand, sat with his back towards him, looking out, but in about a minute, having taken up his glass to drink, he turned round towards the *salle*, and Yeri-Hans made as if he recognised him.

"Hallo!" cried he, "surely I can't be mistaken; that is Mr. Stavolo, of Eckerswir."

He came up to us with his hand to his cap, and uncle, who still remained seated with his head thrown back, replied, pretending to be surprised—

"It's quite true my name is Stavolo, of Eckerswir, but your face I can't remember."

"What!" said the other, "you don't remember little Yeri-Hans, the son of Father Yeri?"

"Ah! So it's you, Yeri?" said uncle, with a forced laugh. "Well, well! And so you are back from your regiment again. Well, I am glad to see you."

"Yes, Mr. Stavolo, it will be a fortnight to-morrow since I returned," said the artilleryman. "You have perhaps heard of me since my arrival?"

"Good gracious, no," said uncle; "people who are nine or ten miles distant don't get news of each other every day. I thought you were still in Africa."

Yeri-Hans at this didn't well know what to say. For a moment he glanced at me with the corner of his eye, and then in a good-humoured tone—

"Why, Mr. Stavolo," said he, "the way of it is this. We have been squeezing each other's ribs a little

here during the fête, and by my faith I thought—he! he! he!—that Diemer, the woodcutter, Polak, the charcoal-burner, and three or four others of your old acquaintances would have been giving you some news of me.”

“What news?”

“Why, I put them all under the table.”

“Oh, ho!” said uncle, “then you are the strongest of the strong, Yeri? You have brought back all sorts of tricks from the wars, eh? Bless my stars! To think of that! Why, no one dare look crooked at you now, I suppose? You are, as one may say, on the very pinnacle of glory!”

He said this with such a droll air that you could scarcely tell whether he was serious or not. Several people along the table even turned away their heads to hide a smile.

The artilleryman, in spite of his sunburned complexion, turned quite red, and it was only after a minute or so that he answered—

“Yes, so it is, Mr. Stavolo; I laid them all on their backs, and, please God, it won’t be the last.”

Then uncle’s cheeks quivered, and as he was about to reply, Yeri-Hans said—

“I ask your pardon, my glass is yonder.”

“No offence,” replied my uncle in a dry tone.

Yeri-Hans took his seat opposite us at the other table amongst three or four of his companions, who had kept his glass for him.

“Your health, Mr. Stavolo,” cried he with a knowing wink.

“Yours in return, Yeri-Hans,” replied my uncle.

They continued to address each other in this way

from the opposite-tables, raising their voices. All the salle was listening. I wished myself anywhere else, and repented heartily that I had come. Uncle, on his side, seemed to have grown twenty years younger, he sat so erect, and his grey eyes sparkled so brightly. Outwardly, however, he was quite calm, only his large hooked nose curved more fiercely, and his grey hair seemed to bristle up round his ears.

“So, Mr. Stavolo,” cried the artilleryman, laughing, “you heard nothing whatever about the fête? It’s quite surprising.”

“Why is it surprising?”

“Why, I should have thought that an old champion like you, who, people tell us, were once so terrible in battle, would scarcely have had your blood so chilled by age as to take no interest in such things. I should have thought they would have roused you up, as we see an old cavalry charger pricking up his ears and neighing when he hears the trumpet call. Well, well! Old age—old age!”

Uncle had by this time turned quite pale, but he still endeavoured to restrain himself, and replied:—

“Horses are only beasts after all, Yeri-Hans. Man learns sense as he grows in years. You don’t know that yet, my lad, but you will learn it by-and-by. It’s in the nature of youth to fight when the whim seizes them, be it right or wrong. Men well up in years, like me, don’t show themselves often, but when they do, people see that old blood is like old wine—it doesn’t sparkle so much, but it warms.”

As he said this Uncle Conrad had something really noble in his face and expression, and I heard the old folks all through the room saying among themselves—

"That's what you may call speaking in the right way."

The tall artilleryman himself, for a moment, seemed to look on uncle with respect, then he said—

"For all that, I should have liked to see you at the fête, Mr. Stavolo. Although you don't enter the lists now, you might have given your opinion of the combatants."

"All that," rejoined uncle, "is as much as to say I am old, isn't it? That I am no longer good for anything but to sit in the ring and scream like the women—'Good gracious! they'll hurt each other—separate them!' Well, you are quite mistaken. Look me well in the face, Yeri; when I make my appearance it will be to show you your master."

"Oh! ho!"

"Yes, boy, your master; for it would provoke any one to hear a man openly boasting of himself as you have done. But to-day I have come here merely to buy some young pigs from Mother Kobus."

"Young pigs!" cried Yeri-Hans, bursting into a loud laugh.

Then uncle rose, as pale as death, shouting in a terrible voice—

"Yes, young pigs, brawler! But I won't let any one tread on my corns, old as I am. Get up to your feet, then, get up I say, since you came here only for that purpose, since you challenge me in this way!" Then, in a graver tone, looking round the room—"Is it likely that a man of my age, out of vanity or love of fighting, or any such thing, should have come one errand to Kirschberg? It's not possible; there's no one but a fool who would do it. I came here on my private

business, my nephew can tell you. But you all see that this young man mocks my grey hairs. Well, let him come on, let him try if he can throw me !”

“This is much better than words,” cried Yeri-Hans. “For my part I am for those who come on boldly, and I leave it for the women to talk afterwards.”

He left his place, and already every one was arranging the tables and benches against the walls, saying—

“This will be a real battle—a terrible battle. Father Stavolo is still strong; Yeri-Hans will have trouble with him.”

Uncle Conrad and Yeri, thus left alone in the middle of the *salle*, waited till everything was in order. Madame Diederich and the servant-maids had taken refuge in the kitchen, and one could see them huddled together in the doorway, looking over each other’s shoulders.

As for me, I no longer knew what to think. I was standing in a corner of the window, looking at the artilleryman, who appeared to me then to be taller and stronger than before, and thinking to myself that, with his great tawny-coloured moustache, he had the countenance of a lion—a lion exulting in his strength, and sure beforehand of victory and conquest. This thought made me shiver. Then when I looked at Uncle Conrad, broad, thick-set, square-built, with rounded back, and arms as thick as other men’s legs, the nose curving like an iron clamp, and his straight hair falling over his forehead till it met the eyebrows, I took courage again, and fancied that, after all, he might prove the strongest. But at the same time I felt as if a stream of cold water was running down my back, and the noise of all these tables being moved back, and the dragging of the

benches along the floor, seemed to rasp, as it were, against my legs. I looked round for some place to sit down, but there were no chairs to be seen; the large salle was completely cleared, and the guests were all mounted on the tables, with their heads close to the ceiling, waiting anxiously. Yeri-Hans unbuttoned his jacket, and handed his cap to a bystander to hold.

"Catch, Kasper!" cried uncle, throwing me his beaver, which fell on the floor.

This appeared to me a bad omen, but he paid no attention, and tucking up the sleeves of his jacket, as he was in the habit of doing when working amongst the vines—

"Let no one tell me afterwards," said he again, "that I challenged this young man. It was Yeri who defied me."

"Yes, yes, I take it all on my own shoulders," cried the artilleryman, laughing.

"You hear him?" exclaimed my uncle. "Well, then, by the grace of God!"

At the same time he squared his shoulders, his left leg in advance, and asked—

"Are you ready, Yeri?"

"Yes, Mr. Stavolo."

Then they caught each other by the collar of the coat, after the manner of Alsace, without touching the body. Their coats must have been of good stout cloth, for at the start Uncle Conrad lifted Yeri-Hans from the ground by main force and held him in this way for a moment as if about to dash him against the wall, but the next instant it was his turn to be lifted up in the same manner. Both fell straight on their feet again. You could have heard a pin drop in the salle.

"You have pretty stout arms," said uncle; "I must admit it—he! he! he!"

"And you also, Mr. Stavolo," said the artilleryman.

The next instant uncle pushed him back with all his strength, his arms thrust forward and his head down, like a bull charging with his horns, endeavouring at the same time to lift him off the ground; but Yeri-Hans, leaning towards him, slid along on his feet the whole length of the room, his boots rasping on the boards with the sound of a jack-plane, and no sooner had uncle stopped pushing him, than, giving a savage cry of "It's my turn now!" he pushed uncle back in his turn in the same manner, but without being able to throw him. Then both paused and looked each other full in the face, and every one present drew a long breath. You could see the marks of the nails of their shoes on the floor. Uncle Conrad was quite pale, whilst the artilleryman was as red as a brick. They let go each other for a moment, and Yeri-Hans said in an angry tone—

"Oh, very good!"

"Are you tired already?" said uncle.

"Tired! Tired, did you say?"

And at the same instant he caught Uncle Conrad by the collar again, shaking him, as if about to try some other manœuvre. Uncle had also caught him in like manner. They stood thus watching each other for more than a minute, and laughing in a strange way. Then all at once Yeri drew uncle towards him with such force that he was obliged to lean backwards in order to resist him, and as he was bending back in this manner, the other, giving a hoarse cry from the very bottom of his chest, threw himself on him so suddenly

that uncle, not expecting anything of the sort, was thrown on the broad of his back on the floor, with his two legs in the air.

Shouts of triumph rose on all sides, and Yeri-Hans rubbed his hands and puffed out his cheeks to the ears. He had had a hard struggle, for his eyes were as red as blood.

Uncle, with his lips pale and trembling, rose from the ground; but scarcely was he on his feet again, in order to renew the battle more fiercely than ever, than his leg bent under him, and he was obliged to lean against a table for support. Instantly there was deep silence in the salle, and Yeri asked—

“What is the matter with you, Mr. Stavolo? Do you feel ill?”

“Go to the devil with you, you scoundrel!” cried uncle. “You have broken my leg. Oh, the villain! He took me like a traitor, and here I am with a broken leg!”

Hearing that, I exclaimed—

“Good God! my uncle is lamed for life! A doctor—quick!”

And Yeri-Hans, putting on his cap, said—

“I am very sorry, Mr. Stavolo, very sorry indeed. But you are wrong to be angry with me. I didn’t do it on purpose.”

“Oh, the scoundrel!” cried uncle, whom they had seated on a chair, and who was grinding his teeth with pain while they were pulling off his shoe. “He has broken my leg with his infernal tricks, and now he has the impudence to say he didn’t do it on purpose. You will answer to me for this, Yeri; you will answer for it dearly!”

"Yes, Mr. Stavolo, whenever you like," said Yeri-Hans. "But you are wrong to cry out so. I give you my word of honour, I am very sorry for what has happened."

Every one saw that he spoke the truth, but uncle, who thought he should have come off victorious, wouldn't listen to what he said.

"Begone with you! begone!" said he. "It stirs my blood even to see you! Oh, the villain! To lame a man of my age!"

Then Yeri-Hans left the room, looking very down-cast, and when they had taken off Uncle Conrad's shoe and stocking, Summer, the pork-butcher of the village, kneeled down before the chair and began to feel the leg from top to bottom. All the people stood round looking at him. Uncle's anger had soon passed off, and he was muttering in a broken voice—

"To think that I am to be a cripple for the rest of my days, and all through that rascal's fault! Oh! what an unlucky idea it was in me to come to Kirschberg to buy those pigs! Oh, the scoundrel! I who was drinking there quietly, without thinking of anything! And even then I would think nothing of it if it wasn't one of his regimental tricks, which he has brought back from Africa, to lame honest folks in this way!"

Old Summer, with his cotton cap and white apron, was still feeling the leg, and at last he said—

"Of broken bones I find none, but a severe strain."

"A strain?" said uncle.

"Yes, and worse than a broken bone, too, Mr. Stavolo. You must put your leg into a bucket of cold water at once, for if you wait any length of time you might have to get the leg cut off."

Then uncle looked at me with such a pale, frightened face, that I felt the tears come into my eyes. He tried to speak, but he could only say—

“Water, Kasper! Some water—quick!”

I ran to the kitchen, where Zeffen, the servant-maid, was busy pumping a bucket of water. I brought it into the *salle* myself, and uncle put his foot and leg into it, shivering, for it was a spring out of the rock, and as cold as ice.

Madame Diederich then said—

“I can’t tell you, Mr. Stavolo, how vexed I am that such an unfortunate accident should have happened in my house.”

“I’m a good deal more vexed than you, I can tell you!” cried uncle angrily.

“You will sleep here, I suppose?”

“I sleep at Kirschberg?—never! I shan’t remain here more than a quarter of an hour. You won’t see me in in this beggarly country again in a hurry. God preserve me from buying young pigs in any such place!”

All the guests of the inn went off one by one to spread the wonderful news, and in a quarter of an hour there was no one left in the *salle* but Uncle Conrad, Summer, the servant-women, and myself, for Madame Diederich had also gone out to tell the man to put the horses in the waggon.

“Mr. Stavolo, you would do well to remain here,” said Summer; “it will be dangerous for you to travel to-day.”

“I don’t care for that. I have a perfect hatred to this place.”

“Then you are decided?”

“Yes.”

"Well, we had better take the leg out of the bucket, and wrap a wet linen cloth about it. That will do almost as well until you reach home."

He looked at the leg, and said again—

"Yes, it's a severe sprain."

He wrapped the linen cloth about it, which Madame Diederich had just brought, and, having passed some water over this, we carried uncle in an arm-chair to the waggon. We placed him at the bottom with his leg supported on a truss of straw, and I took the reins.

All the village was at the windows to see us pass. Madame Diederich said nothing about her bill, and Father Summer called after us as we were leaving—

"I shall call to see you one of these fine mornings, Mr. Stavolo, and hear how you are getting on."

"Very good, very good," said uncle, his teeth chattering, for he was cold. "Make haste, Kasper."

We passed through the village at full gallop. Uncle felt mortified to see so many people at the doors and windows, and exclaimed—

"What a stupid set these people of Kirschberg are! You would think they never saw a sprain before! Any one may chance to make a slip."

At length, when we were outside the village, on the open road, he calmed down all at once and said no more. The anger he felt at his defeat had made him sulky, and, as it were, savage. Meanwhile I whipped the horses on briskly, saying to myself that even this misfortune had its good side, since Margredel would certainly curse Yeri-Hans in her heart, and uncle would be sure to fly in a terrible passion whenever any one mentioned his name in his hearing.

While still thinking in this way, we reached



"We passed through the village at full galop."

Eckerswir, about three o'clock in the afternoon. Uncle looked to the right and left with an uneasy air, fearing to meet Father Brêmer, Meriâne, or any other of those we were in the habit of seeing at the Three Roses of an evening, and who would not have failed to salute us, or even stop us to ask about our journey, especially when they saw Uncle Conrad in the back part of the waggon, and me seated in front, driving. Fortunately nothing of this kind took place. We came close up to the house at a gentle trot, without having met any one we knew. But scarcely had we stopped, when Margredel looked out of one of the windows of the sitting-room, and appeared quite astonished to see us back so soon. Then, perceiving Uncle Conrad with his leg propped up in the straw, she dropped her work and ran out on the door-step, exclaiming—

“What has happened? What is the matter with you, dear father?”

“Nothing, Margredel,” replied uncle; “nothing worth speaking of; I slipped.”

“Slipped! Good heavens! where?”

“In the auberge of the Golden Pitcher; I have got a slight sprain, that’s all.”

Margredel saw plainly by our faces that the matter was more serious than he represented; so, without waiting to hear more, she began to scream out—

“Orchel! Orchel! run as fast as you can go for Mr. Lehmann!”

She ran down the steps, and climbed into the waggon, exclaiming in such a tender voice—“My poor father! my poor dear father!” and embracing and kissing him so, that I would willingly have been in his place sprain and all.

He seemed a good deal affected, and said—

“It’s nothing, Margredel ; it’s not dangerous ; only I can’t get down out of the waggon myself ; you must send for old Roemer and that tall fellow Hirsch to help me.”

Already several of the neighbours had rushed out of their houses on hearing Margredel’s cries. Some caught uncle under the arms and others under the legs, and carried him in this way feet foremost to the top of the steps.

Margredel was crying as if her heart would break. Orchel had gone, and meantime uncle was lying on the bed, with the windows open, and surrounded by half the goodwives of the village, all speaking together, and saying that the white of eggs, chopped onions with parsley, or almond oil mixed with pepper, was the best thing in the world for a sprain, so that one didn’t know which to choose of all these remedies, when Dr. Lehmann entered, saying—

“In the first place I must have the room cleared ; I can’t have all these magpies chattering about me.”

Then approaching Uncle Conrad, who gazed at him with wide-open eyes—

“Well, Mr. Stavolo,” said he, shaking him by the hand, “what the deuce is all this about ?”

“I slipped,” said uncle ; “I slipped in the salle of the Golden Pitcher, at Kirschberg, and put my ankle out of joint, I think.”

“Let me have a look at it,” said Lehmann. “Come this way, Kasper, and perhaps Miss Margredel would be good enough to see how matters are going on in the next room.”

After which he set to work to undo the bandages from the leg, looked at it, and said—

"It's neither more nor less than a good smart sprain. How the deuce, Father Stavolo, did a strong man like you, in a room, on a smooth floor, contrive to get such a sprain as this, a sprain too from front to back, for you must have slipped backwards suddenly, that's quite plain? Was there nothing to keep you up?"

"It was done," said uncle, after ruminating for a few seconds, "by a treacherous attack."

Dr. Lehmann drew himself up suddenly to his full height, saying—

"How! A treacherous attack?"

"Yes, Mr. Lehmann, it's the simple truth. Kasper there will tell you."

Then he related how he had set out in the morning with the intention of buying some young pigs at Kirschberg, from Mother Kobus, and how Yeri-Hans had attacked him unexpectedly in the salle of the Golden Pitcher, and how he had slipped on a plum-stone, which was doubtless the cause of his sprain.

"Ah! very good, now I understand," said the doctor, laughing a little. "We wished to try our strength, Father Stavolo; but that doesn't always succeed. You have had the upper hand for a long time, and——"

"No, no," cried uncle, quite ashamed, "Kasper there can tell you that Yeri-Hans took me by surprise, in the most treacherous manner, and that only for the plum-stone—— Isn't it so, Kasper?"

I had seen nothing of all this, but Uncle Conrad seemed to me unhappy enough already with his sprain, without me contradicting him into the bargain.

"It's as clear as the noon-day," said I. "The artilleryman at first pulled you towards him to give you

the leg, and then pushed you backwards, and you stepped on the plum-stone."

"Yes, he wanted to give me the leg—the scoundrel! but if the plum-stone hadn't happened to be there——"

"Well, well, no matter about that now," said Lehmann. "The sprain is a smart one, I can tell you, and may keep you on your back for six weeks if you commit the smallest imprudence. You did well to put the foot in cold water, only your bandages are not worth a straw."

Then he bound uncle's foot and ankle so carefully and well that he could have walked on it with ease, but he enjoined on him not to use it in any way, and to wet the linen as often as possible.

That done, the doctor went away as he had come, saying he would return the following day.

Uncle Stavolo was in consternation to find that Lehmann had discovered the truth at the very start. For this reason, when we were alone, he said to me—


"These doctors are not worth rope enough to hang them. You may tell them the truth fifty times over, and they won't believe you. Since this is the way, I won't say anything at all. When any one asks me how the thing happened, I shall say—'Ask Kasper; he knows well that it was by a treacherous trick I was thrown. He saw everything—the crook of the leg, and the plum-stone!' But it isn't suitable that I should say so myself; it would look as if I wished to excuse myself, to defend myself with my tongue; that wouldn't do at all. Kasper, you must tell the simple truth, as you did to Lehmann, mind! And now leave me alone! I have been vexed and worried about this matter, and would like to sleep."

I left the room, and finding Margredel crying near the window, with her pretty face buried in her hands, I told her that Yeri-Hans was the cause of all that had happened, that he had attacked her father, that he had challenged him, and at last had thrown him by a treacherous trick.

She made no reply, and continued to sob bitterly.

At supper-time she took her plate and went into her father's room to watch by him, and I had to eat my supper alone, thinking that Margredel was not nearly angry enough with Yeri-Hans, and that in her place I would have cursed him a thousand and a thousand times.

CHAPTER VII

HE news of these events having spread through the country round, Uncle Conrad's fame was singularly lessened. Nothing was talked of but Yeri-Hans. Every one praised his extraordinary strength, and asserted that all the others were a mere nothing beside him.

About the same period Uncle Conrad made a number of profound reflections on the vanity of human affairs. He lay there pondering and thinking from morning till night, and often when I was sitting beside his bed he would begin to say—

“Kasper, the more I think, the more clearly I see that men are fools to moil and toil as they do. Now what is glory? I just ask you. I remember our old curate, Jeronimus, used always to be crying out, ‘Glory

is nothing but an empty vapour.' While you are young and strong, you have glory because others are afraid of you, and, although they may hate you, they daren't say so to your face; but when you grow old, or when you chance to slip, say on a plum-stone, your glory is gone in a moment. And as regards money it's the same thing. What's the good of property when you can't make any use of it! Look at me, for example, Kasper, of what use is it to me to have fifteen acres of vines, when I can't go and see them? Of what use is it to have plenty of old wine in my cellar, when Lehmann won't allow me to drink it for fear of inflaming my sprain? Of what use are all my possessions to me now? I would rather have only the half and be able to enjoy them! In other things it's just the same, for once on a time I had a good wife that I loved, and would have been happy to spend my whole life with her; all my possessions would have given me a hundred times as much pleasure if I could have shared them with Christine. But it's only lost time speaking of her, since she is dead! Do we even know if she is thinking about us now, or if she sees what is going on at Eckerswir? I believe it, but I am not sure. And then there's my daughter, Margredel! I have reared her, I have danced her on my knees, I have watched her growing up—it was my happiness and delight. Well! here she is now one-and-twenty. Suppose you were not there, Kasper, another would come and would take a fancy to her, and I should even have to give him money to induce him to take her as his wife. Isn't all that abominable, to rear up a daughter for fellows that don't know Adam from Eve, and who think they are doing you a great honour by allowing you to grease their paws? I maintain, for

my part, that all is vanity, and if it were not for our holy religion, which promises us the life eternal, it would be far better never to have come into the world!"

So spoke uncle on account of his sprain. Never was a more reasonable man seen, and I said to him—

"You are quite right, uncle; only one must do like other folks, and get married, since it's the custom in Alsace. When you are well again you will think quite differently; you will go and see your vines, and drink a glass of old Kütterlé now and then, as you used to do. As for myself, you know me, and if I have the good fortune to please Margredel, we will all live together, and be as happy as the day is long."

Uncle now refused to see any one except ourselves. Old Brêmer and Father Meriâne had called once or twice, but he gave orders that they should not be admitted.

What annoyed him above all things was to hear Yeri-Hans spoken of. Every time his name was mentioned he changed colour and stammered out—

"Oh! the scoundrel—if I ever chance to meet him at some quiet corner of the road!"

Margredel having attempted one day to say a few words in the artilleryman's favour, on the pretext that he was not the cause of the sprain, but the plum-stone, he turned quite pale, and said in a smothered voice—

"Hold your tongue, Margredel; not a word more if you want to put an end to me at once, you have only to take that rascal's part."

I then saw that Margredel was in love with Yeri-Hans, and I blessed God for what had happened, saying within myself—

"It is Providence that has ordered this thing in His

wisdom, in order that Uncle Conrad and the artilleryman should be at enmity with each other !”

And whilst uncle thought everything was going badly, I, for my part, thought everything was going well.

Meanwhile Margredel seemed out of spirits. She never sang now in the kitchen, or laughed at meals. She was always thinking, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

“ Ah !” said I to myself, when looking at her coming and going in this restless way, “ now I know why the gipsy woman came here ; now I know, Margredel, why you blushed that day when I asked you what that old woman came to the house for ; now I know why you remembered so well the tall, fair-complexioned young man who asked you to dance once on a time at Kirschberg. Now I know why you look sad. But it’s all of no use, Margredel ; Yeri-Hans will never set foot within Father Conrad Stavolo’s threshold. No, no ; it’s all over, Margredel, you must turn your thoughts to another good fellow, who loves you dearly. This tall artilleryman is a scoundrel ; why persist in thinking of him ?”

I was sorry for her inwardly, and yet at the same time I felt happy. I said to myself—

“ When Margredel has moped about in this way for a time, she will forget the other, and then I shall be here to console her. We shall get married, and all will be well again. And even, perhaps, at some future day, five, seven, or ten years hence, when we have a flock of little children about us, and are sitting quietly opposite each other some evening at the fireside, I will ask her suddenly, ‘ I say, Margredel, isn’t it true that once on a time you were thinking of Yeri-Hans, of Kirschberg ?

Come, tell it out boldly ; you have no cause to keep it secret.' Then she will blush, and at last she will answer, ' How can you say such things, Kasper ? Such an idea never once entered my head.' "

And, fancying all that to myself, the tears came into my eyes, and I blessed God that Uncle Conrad had formed the idea of trying his strength in the wrestling match, seeing it was likely to advance my marriage with Margreder.

This state of matters went on for weeks. From time to time uncle sent me out to the vineyard to see if the grapes were getting ripe, and at last I was able to bring him a few bunches, which he ate ; but he would have liked to be out himself, to see the vines with his own eyes, to prepare his hogsheads, and hire the people for the vintage. You can't imagine his distress, therefore, at having to lie there all day without moving, nor all the names he called the man who had put him in this state.

Dr. Lehmann, with his long yellow velvet coat, and his grey cap with turned-up peak, his hands buried up to the elbows in his pockets, and his long spindle legs thrust into his half-boots of reddish leather, came every morning to visit him.

" It's doing very nicely," he would say, after taking off the bandage. " A little more patience, Father Stavolo. Your ankle is getting stronger. The swelling is going down. In a few days you will be able to go about with a stick."

" In a few days !" cried my uncle. " Is this thing never to have an end ?"

" Why, what can you expect ? A sprain requires patience. I know very well how tiresome it is to lie

stretched there on your back, thinking that the fine weather is going past, that the vines are getting on, that the grapes are ripening, that the wine-casks ought to be sulphured, the stands put up, the cellar swept out, and the presser cleaned and oiled. I know all that, but what is to be done? You may consider yourself lucky, after all, Master Conrad."

"How! Lucky?"

"Without doubt. The same thing might have happened to you in the very middle of the vintage, in which case you would have had to leave the care of everything to others. And then the sprain might have been much more severe. In short, you are getting off very safe. Only you must have patience, Mr. Stavolo."

Then, stroking his long, pointed, reddish beard, and smiling to himself, he passed into the large sitting-room, where he always stopped for a minute to talk to Margredel, who was sewing at the window.

"Well, Margredel, well! Still as handsome and fresh as a little rosebud, I see! he! he! he!"

"Oh! Mr. Lehmann, you are always saying civil things to people."

"Not at all, not at all; I always tell the truth—I say what I think. Kasper's a lucky dog; I only wish I were in his place."

Margredel blushed, and, laughing, he shook me by the hand and walked off.

This is the way matters went on every day.

Uncle's patience was almost at an end, when one fine morning the doctor, after examining the ankle, said—

"This time, Mr. Stavolo, you are all right. You may get up and walk about a little with the assistance of a stick."

Uncle's countenance cleared up.

"Then the leg is well?" said he.

"Yes; it only requires a little exercise to strengthen the muscles."

Then the doctor rose, and said, laughing—

"Only, Father Stavolo, remember you must take care. There are so many plum-stones in the world! You had better not put your foot on any of them again, or it might be worse than the first time."

Uncle, at this mention of the plum-stone, turned quite red.

"Very good," said he, "but the plum-stones don't always trip the same people!"

"No, Father Stavolo, but we shouldn't be on the look-out for them, for all that; we might happen to meet them rather oftener than we would like. Well, good-bye; I hope it will be a considerable time before you want my services again."

And upon this the doctor went out, laughing, and Uncle Stavolo, sitting up in bed, exclaimed—

"That tall Lehmann is a tiresome fool with his plum-stones. It seems as if he thought that Yeri-Haus threw me without a plum-stone at all. I can't endure people who make fun of everything."

"Never mind," said I, "he has made your leg all right again, and what does the rest matter to you?"

"Yes, but I didn't send for him to talk to me about plum-stones."

Notwithstanding his ill-humour, Uncle Conrad rose, dressed himself, and without paying any attention to the doctor's instructions, he went out the same day in the afternoon to visit his vines. He returned in the evening very much pleased, and said to us—

"I got on right well; the one leg is quite as strong as the other. Well, after all, I might have fared worse than get a sprained ankle. We won't think about that any more. The vines look well; we shall have a good year. That's the principal thing."

I felt very happy to see Uncle Conrad as strong as ever again.


From this time until eight days before the vintage, close upon St. Jerome's Day, the patron saint of Eckerswir, uncle never mentioned Yeri-Hans' name, and busied himself entirely with his vines, his cellar, and his wine-press.

Meanwhile I went out frequently with Waldhorn. I was earning money pretty fast, and said to myself—"Another couple of hundred crowns, and I shall have my two arpents of vines, and Margredel will be mine."

It was my only happiness to dream of that. When tramping along the roads, and listening to the song of the larks, it seemed to me as if it was the music of my wedding-day. I never returned from any of my rounds without bringing something to Margredel—a ribbon, a pair of earrings—in short, the handsomest thing I could get. She received all these things pleasantly enough, but not at all with the same delight that she used to do. She never smiled now, she never thanked me, and it seemed as if she was saying to herself: "It's a matter of course for him to buy me these things since he looks on me as his property!"

This difference in her manner vexed me greatly, but I consoled myself by thinking that Uncle Conrad would never forgive Yeri-Hans, and that, once married to Margredel, she would forget the other, and be a good little wife to me.

CHAPTER VIII.

OW, five or six days before the fête of Eckerswir, one very hot morning, I was playing an air on the clarionet in the large sitting-room, with my music propped up against the wall between the two open windows, Uncle Conrad was cutting wood outside at the foot of the door-steps, and I heard Margredel washing up the plates in the kitchen. This went on for about half-an-hour, when at last uncle came in in his shirt-sleeves, and began to walk up and down, seemingly in a brown study. As I went on with my music, all at once, putting his hand on my shoulder, he said to me—

“That’s a pretty tune you are playing, Kasper, but leave your music for a little and let us have a talk. What is this the people are saying about me in the village?”

Then, laying down my clarionet, I turned round in my chair.

“Why, uncle,” replied I, “how should I know what the people are saying? You know very well that I have not been at the Three Roses since you got your sprain.”

“Well,” said he, “every one is saying that they are rejoiced to see that Yeri-Hans missed breaking my leg.”

“Why, how can you take such ideas into your head?”

“Oh, very good, you don’t want to hurt my feelings; but I don’t care a straw for the whole village. In the first place, only for that plum-stone that caused me to

slip, Yeri-Hans would have got something to make him remember me. Notwithstanding that, I was wrong to cry out against him as I did. When a man plays and loses he should pay and hold his tongue. In short, that plum-stone made me lose my temper. If Yeri had thrown me by fair force I would have thought it quite natural and right; but to fall in that way, owing to the fault of a plum-stone, is too much, especially as I was very near breaking a leg."

"No doubt," replied I. "But what is done is done. Let us say no more about it."

"No, there's no use in saying anything more about it, Kasper; but things can't remain in this way."

I saw at once that he was thinking of having his revenge, and the thought of Yeri-Hans coming back and Margredel's joy passed before my eyes like a flash of lightning.

"What matters it to you, uncle, to pass for the strongest man in the whole country?" cried I. "What does it bring you in? Not a liard. On the contrary, it only rouses the folks' envy and hatred against you. They would be glad to see every bone in your body broken. They don't pity you in the least when you meet any mishap; they say you are well served!"

"Oh! so they say that, do they?" replied Uncle Conrad. "That is just what I wanted to know. Now that my leg, thank goodness, is well, I must see this tall artilleryman again."

"What, uncle! you, such a quiet, reasonable man!"

"You may talk about reason till you are tired, Kasper. Is it because a man is reasonable that he is to take blows without giving them back? No; all that may do very well for a clarionet player, but it doesn't

suit me at all. Get up, nephew, and come here till I show you something."

He caught me by the button of the coat, and led me into the middle of the room, saying—

"Here is the fête of Eckerswir coming on in five days from this time. I have no fancy for wrestling in the salle of an inn, with the floor covered with plum-stones, morsels of bread, bits of cheese, and other slippery things. Well, a man couldn't have a better opportunity for trying a fall than in the open square, and that's what I shall do. I have discovered a plan for laying this artilleryman on his back. See, Kasper, take a good grip of me here; I'll show you how it's done. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"You have a good hold of me?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Well, look!"

At the same moment he caught my left arm by the elbow, slipped his shoulder under it, and before I knew what I was about I felt my legs whirling up in the air, and I fell my whole length on the floor, with such force that I thought my back was broken. I was so much astonished that I lay for more than half a minute with my mouth wide open, without being able to speak or take breath.

"Well!" cried my uncle, quite proud at his success, "do you see it now, nephew?"

"Yes, I see it," said I, rising; "it's very good—but you might have explained it to me in another way."

"You wouldn't have understood it so well, Kasper," replied he. "That's the way I mean to take with Yeri Hans; only we must endeavour to bring him here, and

that won't be so easy. You must go back to Kirschberg yourself, and ask him, from me, to dine with us next Sunday at the fête."

"Oh! as for that, I tell you plainly I will not," cried I, fairly driven beyond patience. "I have never contradicted you, I have always done whatever you wished, but to bring Yeri-Hans here myself, never! never!"

"Well, well, Kasper," said uncle, "calm yourself; I will send Nickel."

And as I was going to reply, he added—

"No matter what you say or don't say, it will be all the same. I must have Yeri-Hans here: I must see him with his legs in the air as he has seen me."

In this extremity I saw there was only one resource to escape the serious danger that threatened us.

"Uncle Conrad," said I, "you are wrong. Let us consult Margredel; you will see that she thinks as I do."

And without waiting for his reply—

"Margredel!" cried I, opening the door of the kitchen, "listen: do you know that your father wants to have another match with Yeri-Hans? That he wants to bring him here to exterminate him?"

I naturally thought she would have cried out and raised her hands to heaven, and besought her father to stay quietly at home; for the more she loved Yeri and Uncle Conrad, the more anxious, of course, she would be to prevent them fighting. But see what it is to trust in women! Margredel for quick hearing had not her equal anywhere, and I fancy she must have been behind the door all the time; for when she came in she listened to her father calmly, with her apron over her arm, and

without seeming in any way moved. Uncle Conrad began to tell her that it would be the greatest disgrace if he didn't get the better of Yeri-Hans, that the Stavolos would be despised and scoffed at, that they durstn't show themselves at the Three Roses, or anywhere else, &c.

During this discourse Margredel kept her eyes fixed on the ground like a simpleton, and when he had ended—

"You are quite right, father," said she softly; "I can't contradict you; but Yeri-Hans will never venture to come, for he knows right well that you slipped on a plum-stone, and he won't dare to come to grips with you in the public square. I am as sure as I am living of it—you will see."

"Well, if he doesn't come," cried uncle, "the shame will fall on him."

And turning to me—

"You see, Kasper," said he, with a triumphant air, "that Margredel has more sense than you. She knows right well what's suitable; she sees that I am in the right. Go now and finish your music, and I'll tell Nickel to take his stiek and set out for Kirsehberg."

He left the room, the innocent Margredel returned to the kitchen, and I stood there so thunderstruck at what had happened that I could scarcely believe my ears. For several minutes I could do nothing but picture to myself Yeri-Hans making his appearance at Eckerswir in triumph, as proud as a peacock, his arm akimbo, smiling at Margredel and looking down on me from the height of his grandeur. I felt almost choking, and suddenly running into the kitchen, I exclaimed—

"Why, what were you thinking of, Margredel, to talk that way? This rascally artilleryman will lame your father for life. It's abominable conduct of you. You see plainly enough that your father is the weaker of the two, since the other sent him spinning like a fly, and yet you want them to begin again."

I was almost crying as I said this. She didn't seem the least put about, and went on quietly lifting the lids of her saucepans and tasting her sauces. I saw by the bright colour in her cheeks and the sparkle of her eyes that she was inwardly rejoiced, and this made me more and more indignant.

"Nonsense!" said she at last; "you take a gloomy view of everything, Kasper. Father slipped on a plum-stone; this time it will be a very different matter."

"Slipped on a plum-stone! There was as much a plum-stone there as there is on the palm of my hand. Uncle invented that story to excuse himself in the eyes of the company, and I couldn't contradict him. But if Yeri-Hans comes here he will find plum-stones in plenty in the square, in the streets—everywhere."

Instead of working on Margredel's feelings by these judicious observations, I only made her more obstinate. She began to wipe up her plates and dishes, and replied with an air of indifference—

"We shall see. Whether there are plum-stones or not, I am for my father. Yeri will be thrown, you'll see. I feel certain he will be thrown if he dares to come. But he won't come."

And as just then I heard uncle returning, I was obliged to hold my tongue. I returned to the sitting-room, took my clarionet and my music from the table, and ran upstairs like a madman to my bedroom with-

out knowing what I was doing. There I sat down on my trunk with my face buried in my hands, and with such a longing to pour forth my sorrow in tears and groans that I thought my heart would have burst. I began to see that all our plans for the future were going bodily to destruction, and all that through Uncle Conrad's fault, whom I had always looked on as a reasonable being, but who now appeared to me, with his love of glory, as the most insensate of men.

It was the beginning of the end.

At midday, during dinner, uncle did nothing but tell us of all the clever tricks he had discovered for getting the victory. Margredel approved of everything he said, nodding her head, and seeming in an ecstasy of delight. She kept constantly repeating—

“If he would only come—but he'll be afraid; he won't venture to come, I'm sure.”

And uncle replied in a firm tone—

“If he doesn't come, all the country will know that I slipped on a plum-stone.”

For my own part I thought—“Good gracious! is it possible for any one to be such a simpleton at the age of fifty-three? If he were fortunate enough to throw Yeri he would fairly die of joy. And that Margredel, now she leads the old man by the nose, by making him believe he is the stronger! That's just the way she would have led me all my life.”

Oh, what pain this spirit of trickery and cunning gave me!

In spite of all, I couldn't help thinking Margredel perfectly beautiful. I would have liked to fly from the house in order to hide my despair. I saw by her eyes that she guessed all my thoughts, but that she cun-

ningly pretended to believe that Yeri-Hans would not come, whilst all the while the gipsy woman perhaps had been bringing her messages for the last month. I saw all that. I was almost sure of it, and I felt as if I must stay.

Oh, how delighted I should have been to hear that big Yeri had fallen headforemost from his father's barn, or that he had had five or six ribs broken by some wrestler stronger than himself! Yes, I am ashamed to say how happy that would have made me. But none of these things took place, and I must now tell you of the fête. Since I have begun I must finish.

CHAPTER IX.



THE answer from Kirschberg arrived the same evening, towards eight o'clock. We were at supper, when Nickel entered, with his stick in his hand, and announced to us that Yeri-Hans accepted Mr. Stavolo's invitation to dinner, that he was glad to hear that he had got quite well of his sprain, and that he would consider it a real honour to try a fall with him in the public green of Eckerswir before all comers.

This news filled Margredel with joy, but she was far too knowing to let it appear.

"I declare, after all," exclaimed she, with an air of astonishment, "Kasper was right! I never could have believed that Yeri-Hans would come—no, I never could have believed it."

Uncle Conrad, in his enthusiasm, wanted to show me

several new tricks which he had invented to overthrow the big artilleryman, but I had had quite enough of them already.

"Thank you, uncle," said I, feeling very sad, "I will take your word for it. Show these tricks to Yeri himself. I know nothing about them. All I wish now is that there may be no plum-stones in the square."

So saying, I left the sitting-room in a state of mind impossible to describe.

"Wait, Kasper, wait a moment, will you?" cried uncle.

But I never even turned my head. I wished everybody at Jericho, Yeri-Hans, uncle, Margredel, and myself too. I had thoughts of flying to America, to Algeria—no matter where.

The following morning the preparations for the fête began. Every one set to work to whitewash the large salle, to scour the tables and benches, to clean the windows and sand the floor. One would have said that Yeri-Hans was some prince or other, so anxious did Uncle Conrad seem to give him a good reception. Margredel sent for Catherina Vogel, cook to old Bockes, the curé, to help her to prepare her küchlen, her kougelhof, her cream tarts, and her cheesecakes. The kitchen was in a blaze from six o'clock in the morning till nine at night.

And just see the cunning of women! The nearer the moment approached the more gracious was Margredel towards me, doubtless for the purpose of keeping me in uncertainty, and preventing me from informing uncle of what was going on.

"Hey! Kasper, why do you look so sad?" she would say to me. "Come, smile at me like a good fellow."

I would give anything to know what can be vexing you."

And she laughed so merrily, showing her little white teeth, that I was forced to appear gay, although the tears were in my eyes. Sometimes, even, I took myself to task for being so suspicious. I said to myself, "Can Margredel be capable of feigning to that extent? Could she look at me so lovingly if at the bottom of her heart she didn't love me a little? It's impossible! It's wrong of you, Kasper, to harbour such thoughts."

And I tried to find all sorts of reasons for believing that I was mistaken, that Margredel loved me, that she was not thinking of Yeri-Hans, that she only did these things to try me, to make me jealous; in short, I invented a thousand explanations of her conduct, to try and deceive myself; but in spite of all I saw clearly how it was, and said to myself, "Poor Kasper! poor Kasper! you had much better go at once; what's the use of trying to blind yourself in this way? It's the other that she loves. It's because the other is coming that she sings, and dances, and laughs, and gets ready all these dainties. Has she ever done the one quarter of it for you?"

Ah! how sad it is to think such things, and not to be sure of anything! "If I was only sure," I said to myself many and many a time, "I would take my knapsack and be off, and by-and-by, after a time, perhaps, I might forget it and be happy again."

What surprised me most was, Margredel's confidence; for after what I had told her on the subject of the plum-stone, she must have known that Yeri-Hans would get the better of her father, and then all these invitations, and compliments, and marks of friendship

of uncle's towards the big artilleryman would change into hatred and maledictions. Those who knew Uncle Conrad's character, his extraordinary love of glory, and his vexation at having been conquered, must have foreseen this, and Margredel, with her cleverness, knew right well that if Yeri-Hans carried off the victory again, he durst never venture to put his foot in the house, and that if he ever came to ask her in marriage, uncle would think nothing of sticking a pitchfork into him. This was quite certain. Well, Margredel never showed the least uneasiness. She seemed in high spirits. I couldn't help fancying that there was some abominable trick or other under all this, I suspected that the gipsy had been there again, I had all sorts of ideas of this kind, and I always ended by saying to myself, "If only uncle is beaten, if Yeri-Hans only succeeds in throwing him, then all will be well. Margredel may mope, and look glum, and cry as much as she pleases, uncle will remain as firm as a rock. The very look of the artilleryman would throw him into a towering rage. It's unfortunate that he should have to be beaten again, but it's the best thing that could happen for everybody."

And thinking in this way, I took heart again. I even laughed a little now and then when she passed her hand over my hair. What can you expect? A falling man will catch at any twig that comes in his way, without stopping to think whether it will bear his weight or not.

Up to the evening before the fête Margredel was most gracious in her manner towards me. I shall never forget that on this evening, about six o'clock, a few minutes before supper, as I was sitting thinking, with

my head against the clock-case and my legs crossed, listening to the tic-tac of the pendulum and the crackling of the kitchen fire, suddenly Margredel came in her short petticoat and bodice, her arms bare, and made a sign to me to follow her, in order not to disturb Uncle Conrad, who was reading the *Limping Messenger*, at the corner of the table, with his spectacles on his nose and his eyes wide open. I followed her, and when she had closed the door, she showed me, in the first place, her tarts and beignets ranged neatly on the shelves of the dresser, and as I was looking at them, she led me opposite a plate of kùchlen powdered with fine sugar, saying—

“Look, Kasper, I made these for you, and yet you don’t look pleased!”

“For me, Margredel?” said I softly.

“Yes, yes, for you,” cried she; “expressly for yourself! You surely don’t doubt what I tell you?”

Then, not knowing what to say in reply, I sat down by the fireside, where Mother Catherina was coming and going, lifting off the lids of the saucepans, and began to eat the beignets, whilst in spite of myself the tears trickled down my cheeks.

I said to myself—“She loves me still!” and I thought the beignets the most delicious I ever ate.

Margredel had gone away to lay the cloth. When she returned I smiled at her, and taking her hand—

“Ah! Margredel,” cried I, “there’s something I have to ask your forgiveness for.”

“What is it?” said she, quite surprised.

“Oh! no, no! I cannot tell you now. Some other time—some other time!”

I was thinking that I had done wrong in suspecting

her of deceiving me, and that is what made me ask her pardon. She looked at me. I didn't know whether at the moment she guessed my thoughts, but she blushed and said—

"Come in, Kasper; supper is on the table. Father is waiting for you."

"Oh! how good those beignets were!" exclaimed I. "I am not in the least hungry now."

"Come, come, be off out of this!" said Mother Catharina, laughing; "we don't want any men here."

And I returned to the salle and took my seat at the table with more confidence than I had felt for a long time.

"Waldhorn is in the village," said Uncle Conrad to me the moment I sat down. "I forgot to tell you that he called here to see you this afternoon whilst you were out taking a walk in the Reeberg. He expects you this evening at the Three Pigeons with the whole orchestra. To-morrow you will earn two crowns at least, Kasper; the next day as much, and so on till the last day of the fête. It's not a bad trade playing the clarionet."

Then he added, laughing—

"The two arpents are getting on, my boy. Take courage!"

As he said this I felt as if a great weight were lifted off my breast—as if I had awakened out of some frightful dream.

No sooner was supper over than I ran over to the Three Pigeons, where Waldhorn was waiting for me. All our comrades were there, their trombones and French horns hanging on the walls. We shook hands, and calling for a chope or two of wine we began to talk

of business. It was arranged that we should perform at two of the tables d'hôte the following day, from one till three, and that after vespers we should play for dancing at the Madame Hütte. Waldhorn had already secured the job.

I returned home about ten o'clock. Uncle Conrad had gone to bed, and Margredel and Catherina Vogel were still busy with their preparations. I took a peep at Margredel as I passed, through the kitchen window, then mounted to my bedroom, where, having got into bed, I slept till near eight o'clock the next morning—a thing which hadn't happened to me for six weeks before.

It was the noises of the fair, the squeaking of the wooden trumpets, the cries of the booth-keepers and the proprietors of the different games, that at length awoke me. I leaped out of bed in high spirits, and having slipped on my pantaloons I opened my window. The weather was magnificent, the air was filled with sunshine. The flag was floating over the Madame Hütte, the people were threading their way amongst the stalls, or making the circuit of the crockery and other articles spread out on the green, purchasing, bargaining, and gazing at the goods arranged in tempting array on the shelves. The players were already gathered in groups round the rampô, and all down the street, as far as the eye could reach, nothing was to be seen but rows of country carts, and the great waggons, with ladder-like sides, peculiar to the district, all crowded with three-cornered hats, red waistcoats, embroidered head-gear, little short cherry-coloured petticoats, and rosy laughing faces.

You will readily imagine that on this day, when

Yeri-Hans was expected, I didn't forget to make myself as smart as I could. Eight days before, when returning from Munster, I had bought expressly for the occasion a new shirt, embroidered with red on the collar and front, the very handsomest that could be got for love or money; this I put on. I also put on my gold earrings, a silver brooch in the shape of a heart in the bosom of my shirt, my embroidered shoulder-straps, as broad as my hand, my green coat with bright copper buttons, and my high boots.

I felt happy in taking all this pains with my dress: I was thinking of Margredel. I fancied she would see that I was handsomer than the artilleryman, and this idea brought the tears into my eyes. From time to time I sat down to think and listen to what was going on below. There was a great noise of people coming and going and talking together in the large salle, and every moment Uncle Conrad's loud voice could be heard welcoming his guests.

"Ha! Good day, Mr. Burgomaster. Ha! ha! ha! It's a real pleasure to see you! This is fine weather we have got now. Why, Madame Seypel, positively you are growing younger every day!"

"Oh! Mr. Stavolo, Mr. Stavolo!"

"It's the real truth. Ah! Madame Seypel, you put me in mind of the good old times, some five-and-twenty years ago now, when I used to dance the Lutzstein Hopser with you. He! he! he!"

Then they laughed and took their seats, as I could hear from the scraping of chairs on the floor. Meanwhile I listened; I looked at myself in the glass; I brushed my hat with my sleeve. I was always afraid of finding a speck somewhere or other on my dress.

Outside, the hum of the merrymakers in the fair grew louder and louder. I had left my room door open, and the smell of the aniseed tarts, the pies, and the k^üchlen came up the stairs. It had just struck eleven, and I felt surprised that Yeri-Hans had not yet made his appearance. I had heard uncle say once or twice to Margredel on the stairs—

“That rascal isn’t here yet! Can he mean to play me a trick? If he isn’t here in a quarter of an hour, we’ll sit down quietly to dinner without troubling our heads about him.”

I could see from the tone of his voice that he was getting angry. Margredel said nothing. I laughed inwardly, and was about to go down, when all at once uncle cried out—

“There he is!”

I had already my foot in the lobby, but at this exclamation of my uncle’s a strange feeling came over me. I went back into my room, and peeping cautiously from the window, I saw in front of the house, just at the foot of the steps, Yeri-Hans mounted on a fine dappled grey horse, with a skin like silk, and a beautiful long tail, which he kept whisking about. He had on his magnificent artillery uniform, and his shako, with two bright copper cannons crossed in front and a red plume above, which gave him a superb appearance. Picture to yourself this martial-looking man, mounted on his grey charger, that pawed the ground and champed the bit with impatience, and all along the railing Uncle Conrad’s guests leaning over the balustrade to welcome him. Margredel, with bare arms, in a little headdress of blue silk, and embroidered chemise, her cheeks as red as cherries, and her eyes sparkling; the fat burgomaster,

raising his hat and puffing out his stomach like a bullfinch; Mrs. Councillor Seypel, smiling with an agreeable air, with her great quilted cap perched on the back of her head, her withered cheeks, sharp nose, and the waist of her gown more than half-way up her back; Mr. Preceptor Reinhart, Father Brêmer and his two tall red-haired daughters Lotchen and Grédelé, old Meriâne, Orchel, and Catherina Vogel—picture to yourself all these people leaning over each other's shoulders, and all round, the goodwives of the neighbourhood collected at the windows, and the crowds of people in the fair turning round to gaze on the sight. This is what I saw, and I could not help thinking that Margredel would certainly be dazzled by this fine uniform, and that my clothes would look nothing beside it, which put me in a sad state of trouble. I was in a sort of way ashamed of myself; I would have liked to hide somewhere, and yet, in spite of myself, my grief and vexation kept me nailed to the spot.

Uncle Stavolo, with his broad-brimmed beaver ornamented with a blue ribbon, his broad shoulders almost bursting through his tight-fitting jacket, and his face beaming with smiles, had just run down the steps into the street, and was standing gazing at the artilleryman from head to heel, with the greatest admiration, shaking him warmly by the hand, and exclaiming—

“You are welcome, Yeri-Hans, you are heartily welcome! There's no enmity between us, I hope?”

“Enmity between us, Mr. Stavolo?” said the other, in a laughing, cheerful way. “Never! Since our encounter at Kirschberg I love and esteem you more than ever,”

"That's right!" said uncle; "I am glad to hear it. The table is laid for dinner. You are just in time."

Then Yeri, looking up, saw Margredel, and exclaimed—

"Your servant, Miss Margredel. Handsomer, fresher, and more graceful than ever, I see! Ah, Mr. Stavolo, you may be a proud man!"

"Oh! Mr. Yeri," replied the innocent Margredel, "I'm quite sure you don't believe a word of what you are saying!"

"I! I believe a thousand times more than I say," cried the artilleryman, his eyes beaming with undisguised admiration.

Then he saluted the other personages of the company by raising his hand to his kepi, and, leaping to the ground, he gave his horse's bridle to Councillor Spitz, who appeared flattered at the honour, and began to laugh like an old magpie, with his mouth grinning from ear to ear. Oh! the baseness of men! To think of a municipal councillor doing such a thing! If Orchel had not come forward to take the bridle and lead the horse off to the stable, I verily believe Mr. Spitz would have held it to all eternity.

As for me, seeing Yeri-Hans coming up the steps, I thought it was time for me to go downstairs, in order to avoid causing any scandal in the house, for if I had not made my appearance at table, Uncle Conrad would have insisted on knowing the reason. I went down, therefore, and Yeri-Hans, meeting me in the kitchen, cried—

"Hallo! Is it you, Kasper? How goes it, Kasper-my boy?"

You may imagine my indignation at being addressed

in this familiar way by a scoundrel like that, but as he held out his hand, I was of course obliged to take it, and to say in reply—

“Why, pretty well, Yeri; I feel quite well, thank you.”

“That’s right, I’m glad to hear it,” said he, laughing, and showing his great white teeth.

We entered the *salle* just as Catherina Vogel made her appearance from the kitchen with an immense smoking soup-tureen. Yeri-Hans twirled up the ends of his moustache, and said, as if speaking to himself—

“I’m as hungry as a hawk.”

And as I passed behind him, I thought, “I wish you had a bellyful of good drubbing!”

“Hey! Yeri, Yeri, this way,” cried uncle, pointing to the end of the table; “sit here beside me. The others can find whatever places they choose.”

Yeri seemed to think it quite natural that he should have the place of honour. He took his seat beside Uncle Conrad, and the other guests seated themselves wherever they fancied. As for me, I got near the window at the back, beside Madame Seypel, who talked very little, and old Omacht, who said scarcely anything. In the state of mind I was in the place exactly suited me. I could scarcely help bursting out crying, and yet I was obliged to put a good face on it and eat something. As for Margredel, she never gave me a look. My handsome embroidered shirt, my green coat, my gold earrings, were all thrown away. Uncle Conrad and his daughter had eyes for no one but Yeri-Hans.

CHAPTER X.



COULD talk to you for hours about this dinner, which lasted till three o'clock. Yes, I could talk to you about it for hours, although it is such a time since it took place.

I can still fancy I see, sitting amongst the row of guests, Mr. Municipal Councillor Spitz, with his long sharp nose, his great round eyes, and his rat-tailed wig, the tie bobbing about on his shoulders as he moved. I can see him munching away, and laughing at every word Uncle Conrad uttered; and, near him, the bald, fat burgomaster, lifting his elbow, and drinking, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling in a sort of rapture; and Miss Sophia Schlick, Margredel's schoolmistress, with a little curl on each temple, and three or four stray hairs stretched over her forehead, like the strings of a piano. I can hear her repeating every minute—"How unfortunate that I breakfasted so late! I haven't a bit of appetite! It's most unfortunate!" All which didn't prevent her from playing havoc with the dishes of sausages, the pâtés, the küchlen, the kougelhof, and everything she could see on the table; and Madame Wagner, the wife of the ex-brigadier of gendarmerie, large, fat, and sallow; a cap, with huge red ribbons, perched on her frizzy head, and the drops of her immense earrings falling down below her great hanging cheeks. I can see her pushing her chair farther back, with a deep sigh at each remove, and at last merely picking in her plate with her arm outstretched at full length; and Mr. Preceptor Reinhart,

who was in the habit of taking pills three days before any wedding dinner or other entertainment that his numerous friends invited him to; and old Meriâne, who clacked his tongue every time he emptied his glass, and murmured in a low voice—"That's Kutterlé of 'thirty-four; that's Rangen of last year; that's Drahenfeltz," and so on, without paying the least attention to what was going on.

And Uncle Conrad, who every now and then raised himself up in his chair, and coughed, as if about to recount his former battles, but did not venture to do so, recollecting his mishap at Kirschberg; and the tall artilleryman, in his handsome uniform, sitting bolt upright, with a haughty martial air, twisting up his moustache, on which the drops of wine were standing, wiping his chin with his napkin, and glancing towards the wide-open door of the kitchen, where the innocent Margredel was coming and going, bringing in the dishes and bottles with a timid air, and smiling to show her little white teeth.

Ah! good gracious, I could talk for ever about that dinner. I know that the same guests partook afterwards of festivities at which I was not present, and that several of them even mocked at what they called my simplicity, as if the faults of others, their bad faith, and their hypocrisy, could be fairly charged against me—as if there was anything shameful in believing the word of those whom we love, and as if honest folks were ridiculous for allowing themselves to be deceived through the goodness of their hearts! I might describe them in my turn, and show up their fearful gormandising, but I would rather be silent, for ill-natured tongues would say that I spoke so from envy and jealousy.

No: I prefer to remain silent, and put up with the injustice which has been done me.

The entertainment seemed to me as if it would never be over. I was wearied to death. I saw that things were going from bad to worse, that bottle after bottle was emptied, and that uncle was on the point of beginning the history of his battles, for ever since the adventure at Kirschberg, in place of keeping modestly silent as he used to do, he never ceased talking of his former victories. He was just beginning, when Orchel touched me on the shoulder, and told me that Waldhorn was outside with the rest of our comrades, and was waiting for me to make our rounds through the village.

I seized this pretext and left the room, to the great satisfaction of Margredel and Yeri-Hans, and to my own too. What was the use of all this hypocrisy? Why not simply say to people—"I don't want to have anything more to say to you?" Why give me the kùchlen the evening before? Why allow me to hope to the very last? Margredel's conduct filled me with indignation.

Notwithstanding this I left the room with a gay laughing air, not to give the artilleryman the gratification of seeing that he had caused me pain. I shook hands with Waldhorn on the stairs, laughing all the time like a madman at my own stupidity, which surprised him a good deal, as latterly he had seen me look very low-spirited.

"You have been drinking, Kasper?" said he.

"Is it I? Only one glass of wine, I assure you. No: I was laughing at some ideas which were running through my head."

"And your clarionet?"

"I'll go and fetch it."

As I was crossing the *salle* to get to my room, Uncle Conrad called out to me—

"Hi! Kasper!"

"What is it, uncle?"

"Are the musicians outside?"

"Yes."

"Well, why don't they come in?"

"Do you wish for some music?"

"Of course we do, on a day like this!"

"Very good! We will be here directly."

I ran upstairs to get my clarionet; then, going to the window, I called to my comrades to come in. When they had all entered, we began to play, and with such life and spirit, too, especially my clarionet, that I couldn't help being surprised at it myself. Margredel looked at me uneasily, but I only laughed and threw mocking looks at her in return. I was no longer like the same man. I was beside myself.

Uncle Conrad was singing and beating time on the table. Twice he called us back when we were on the steps going away. At last he insisted on singing the old song of "The Three Hussars," setting out for the wars, each verse of which ended with the words, "Adieu! adieu! adieu!" It was their sweethearts, their mothers, their uncles, and their cousins who were thus bidding the hussars farewell.

While my uncle was thundering out the words of the song, with his deep, strong voice, to the accompaniment of the music, all the guests joining in the chorus, Margredel left the *salle*. The tall artilleryman was keeping time with the handle of his knife on the table. I had put my clarionet under my arm, for I was

trembling from head to foot. I had not strength to play another note; I felt my cheeks, and even the roots of my hair, growing cold, and when, for the last time, the chorus repeated, "Adieu! adieu! adieu!" I turned round, and looked towards the kitchen door, where Margredel had hid herself, thinking that she, too, would perhaps address the same words to me. But she said nothing.

Then, every one having stopped singing, I began to laugh. It seemed to me as if something had given way in my breast, like the spring of a clock, which whirls round without you being able to stop it, and which marks all the hours on the dial in a minute.

I saw that the other musicians were going, and I followed them without being perceived. Once outside I grew calmer, and, as the comrades were climbing the grande rue in a body, my old friend Waldhorn held me back a little, and said to me—

"Kasper, one would think, from the way you talk and laugh, that you were in high spirits, but I can see that you are sad."

"It's true," said I; "I feel as if I would burst out crying every minute."

"And why?"

Then, whilst we were walking along, I told him everything that had happened.

"Bah!" said he, "is that all? Why, so much the better. A musician has no business getting married. And, besides, your Margredel——"

"Well, what?"

"I will tell you about that another time. Here we are at Dreyfon's the deputy's door. Let's go in. All this, Kasper, shouldn't cost a man of sense like you

two minutes' thought. When a woman is going to pounce on you in this way, and another man steps into your place, you ought to thank your stars a hundred times for your escape. It's a proof that a good angel is watching over you."

Talking in this way, Waldhorn drew me into the *salle*, where we made a second halt. In short, up to half-past two we made the rounds of all the rich folks in the village, and at three o'clock we were on our stand in the *Madame Hütte*.

I kept constantly thinking of what Waldhorn had said to me, but it didn't put me in any better spirits, and I thought to myself that what suits one man doesn't always suit another.

There was quite a crowd of people dancing. They had come from Kirschberg, Ribeauville, St. Hippolyte, Lapourtraye, Orbay—from everywhere, in short. All these beavers and three-cornered hats, with their gay ribbons, and the women's dresses of a thousand different colours, whirling round before my eyes, fairly dazzled and stupified me. The joy, the shouts, the bursts of laughter, sent a pang through my breast. I lost all command of myself; I felt as if I would go mad.

From time to time Waldhorn said to me—

"For Heaven's sake, Kasper, don't blow so strong. Nothing can be heard in the orchestra but your instrument!"

But on I went, without a moment's pause, now half a note higher, and at other times half a note lower, than the rest, with my cheeks puffed out to the front of my nose, and scarcely seeing an object before me.

Waldhorn was in despair, and the comrades looked

at me, fairly stupified, for such a thing had never happened with me before.

All at once, towards four o'clock, Uncle Conrad's thundering voice awoke me out of my stupor. I rubbed my eyes and looked round.

All the guests were entering the hall, I leave you to imagine in what a state, uncle leading the way, with his great beaver, ornamented with ribbons, over one ear, and Mother Wagner leaning on his arm; then Yeri-Hans with Margredel; the burgomaster with Madame Seypel; and the others following two and two, as red as boiled lobsters. Uncle, with his arms in the air, was giving hurrah after hurrah until the Madame Hütte fairly shook again. The artilleryman was leaning over, with moistened eyes, towards Margredel, twisting his moustache, and talking to her with a very loving air.

At this sight I began to blow so strong that the false notes came thick and fast, and Waldhorn, who could stand it no longer, cried out—

“Kasper, are you deaf? For the love of Heaven, stop! You will put the whole company to flight.”

But what mattered his expostulations to me? My despair was so great that I paid no heed to anything that was said to me.

In the meantime uncle began to waltz with Mother Wagner, putting his hands on her shoulders, in the old-fashioned style; then all the guests joined in, and I saw no more—everything seemed whirling round me, both the building and the people. I heard the boom of the horn, the shrill blast of the trumpet, the piping of the second clarionet, the scraping of the shoes on the floor; I saw the flutter of the ribbons, the clouds

of dust mounting up to the roof, the hands of the dancers held gracefully in the air, a crowd of smiling and laughing faces spinning round underneath, like the images of Montbéliard, where you see the wedding guests descending to the infernal regions, dancing, singing, and embracing like maniacs.

As I was thinking of these things, in a stupid way, the waltz came to an end, the dancers led their partners to their seats, and I heard Uncle Stavolo cry out—

“Now is the time, Yeri; are you ready?”

“Yes, Mr. Stavolo,” replied the artilleryman.

There was a deep silence.

I understood at once that they were going to wrestle. For a moment I was in hopes that Yeri-Hans would crush two or three of uncle’s ribs in, and that then they would be enemies for life. I pictured to myself Margredel coming back to me, and my saying—

“Oh, ho! You want to come back, do you? but I know you now. I don’t want to have anything more to say to you!”

This idea came across me like a flash, but the next moment I became attentive to what was going on, and I saw Uncle Conrad and Yeri-Hans leaving the Hütte. The crowd followed them in a body. In passing, Margredel and Yeri-Hans gave each other a look. Margredel was deadly pale. She remained behind in the Madame Hütte, near the door, not wishing to be present at the struggle. Yeri smiled, and I saw him bend his head. I asked myself—

“What can he mean by that sign?”

But almost immediately afterwards I heard some one cry outside—

“Make room! make room!”

It was Uncle Conrad's voice.

Waldhorn and two or three of our comrades, not being able to leave the stand, had pulled off a plank from the building in order to see into the square. I approached the opening, and saw that the crowd below had already formed a circle—men, women, and even several children mounted on their fathers' shoulders. In the centre of the circle were Uncle Stavolo and Yeri-Hans. They had both taken their coats off and handed their hats to some of the bystanders to hold, and were standing watching with grave and observant looks.

"Yeri, let us take each other round the body this time," said uncle.

"As you please, Mr. Stavolo; I await your pleasure," replied the artilleryman.

"Well, come on—in all honour and friendship!" cried uncle in a voice of thunder.

"In all honour and friendship!" replied Yeri-Hans.

They took hold of each other with terrific force, their legs crossed, their arms pressed into each other's sides like tightened ropes, each seeking to shake the other from his position, and every now and then drawing long breaths, while the foam gathered about their lips.

I saw at once that Uncle Conrad wanted to try his famous trick on Yeri-Hans; but the latter apparently knew it: he smiled, and drew back his arm. Then uncle endeavoured to square his leg so as to throw the other over it; but Yeri-Hans did the same on the other side, so that it remained to be seen which of them was strong enough to bend his adversary, a thing which seemed as difficult for the one as the other.

He was quite pale, as on the former occasion;

Yeri as red as fire. The crowd around were looking on in silence, when a child, who was perched on his father's back, cried out—

“The artilleryman is the strongest!”

Then uncle, turning his head, gave the child a furious look, and almost at the same moment Margredel, who had remained in the background, squeezed her way through the crowd, and I saw her looking fixedly at Yeri-Hans, as if to remind him of something. The tall artilleryman's eyes were as red as blood, his moustache was bristling with rage; he held Uncle Stavolo in the air, whilst the latter, with his legs wide apart, was twisting himself furiously, trying to get his feet to the ground again, but without being able to succeed. He was just on the point of being thrown; but no sooner had Margredel made her appearance in the way I have described, than the expression of Yeri's eyes softened, and with a deep sigh he let Father Stavolo drop to the ground again. Then, in about a minute, appearing to lose breath, he allowed himself to be lifted in his turn and hurled to the earth amidst a universal cry of astonishment. In trying to rise he turned over on his back, and both his shoulders touched the ground, so that Uncle Conrad was declared the conqueror.

Uncle then ran up, fairly stupified at his victory, for he had given himself up for lost; uncle ran up, caught the tall artilleryman's hands, and asked—

“Yeri, are you hurt?”

“No, Mr. Stavolo, no, thank God,” replied Yeri-Hans, looking at Margredel with sparkling eyes; “I never felt better. But I yield you the palm, Mr. Stavolo; you have conquered me!”

All this time he was brushing the dust off his trousers with his pocket-handkerchief.

Uncle, fairly out of his wits with delight, exclaimed—

“Yeri, you are the strongest man at the collar I know of; I am the strongest round the body, it’s true, but you bear me no grudge for that, I trust. Give me your hand upon it!”

“With all my heart,” said the artilleryman, still gazing at Margredel.

They embraced; and Margredel, looking at them from a distance, put her hand on her heart. Then I saw it all. This tall rascal of an artilleryman had allowed himself to be conquered out of love to Margredel; knowing that if he threw uncle in the public square he could never see her again, or ask her in marriage. By this trick he expected to ingratiate himself with my uncle—a man full of pride and vanity, and all the more blind to the plot against him, inasmuch as he was really afraid of Yeri-Hans, and couldn’t understand himself how he had got the better of him. His only dread now was that he would have to give the tall artilleryman his revenge. So he embraced him on both cheeks, repeating—

“Yes, Yeri-Hans, at the collar I don’t know the man who can equal you.”

Then turning to the crowd—

“You all understand, this is the strongest man at the collar! It is I, Stavolo, who say it, and if any one ventures to assert the contrary, he shall answer for it to me. Ah, Yeri! you gave me trouble enough, I can tell you, but at present we have only to enjoy ourselves. Take Margredel, Yeri, take Margredel; dance and yourselves, my children! You will stay with us

during the whole fête, remember, Yeri! We'll have a merry time, you'll see. We'll be as gay as larks! Yes, yes, you must stay with us."

"With all my heart, Mr. Stavolo; it will be a great honour for me."

"An honour! nonsense, man, the honour is all on my side. Well, what are you all standing gaping at there? Be off with you," continued uncle, addressing the crowd, who were staring in puzzled surprise, for he still dreaded that the presence of the spectators would suggest to Yeri the unlucky idea of beginning again.

He buttoned up his coat, assisted the tall artilleryman to pass his arms through the sleeves of his laced jacket, then, taking him by the arm—"Ha, comrade!" exclaimed he, "I would like to see any five, ten, ay, or twenty men who would challenge us two! If the whole fair together were to attack us, they wouldn't frighten us much, eh?"

Thus spoke the old fool, like a child of six years old.

The artilleryman laughed, without making any reply. The sight of Margredel seemed to act like witchcraft on him. He buttoned his coat, and at last said—

"Miss Margredel, now that I am conquered by your father, I hope you won't be ashamed to dance with me?"

"Ashamed!" exclaimed uncle; "I would like to see her ashamed of you. Aren't you the strongest at the collar? Ashamed! Listen to me, Margredel: the greatest pleasure you can give me is to dance with Yeri-Hans. As for me, I'm going to have a glass or two at the Three Pigeons. Take care of my daughter, Yeri; I'll be back by-and-by."

This man, once so prudent and sensible, would now have given wife, child, house, everything he possessed,

to be considered the best wrestler in the country. It makes my flesh creep to think of it even at this distance of time. Just see to what the love of glory leads!

Yeri-Hans thereupon returned with Margredel to the Madame Hütte, but to tell you how they danced, the looks they gave each other, the way Margredel leaned her forehead on the breast of that artilleryman in the waltz; how they rushed about—in short, the way in which they went on—is out of my power. But, to give you an idea of the thing in one word, Margredel by her conduct so totally disgusted me, that my mind was made up at once how to act.

“Even,” said I to myself, “if Yeri-Hans were to go back to Africa to-morrow, I could never marry Margredel. It’s all over—I’ll have nothing more to say to her!”

But for all that, the sight of her cut me to the heart; and during the three days that the fête lasted, having lost all hope, I may as well confess that I longed to die.

The most melancholy part of the affair was Uncle Stavolo’s blindness. Yeri-Hans had become his idol, and his whole delight seemed to be to pamper him up, and strut about arm-in-arm with him through the village. The tall artilleryman had the best room in the house. Every morning Uncle Conrad went up to waken him, about seven o’clock, carrying a bottle of Kutterlé and two glasses, which he placed on the small table, and then you could have heard them all over the house, laughing and talking of their former battles. Margredel could scarcely contain herself with impatience until Yeri came downstairs; then she smiled so sweetly, she poured out his coffee so gracefully, she gave pretty tosses of her head, she tripped about on

the point of her toes—in short, she didn't know what to do to fascinate and subdue the strong, handsome, brave, and terrible Yeri-Hans. As for me, I was like a complete stranger in the house!

At last, on the fourth day, utterly sick and tired of all this, I got up very early, folded up my linen and clothes neatly, packed my knapsack, took my clarionet, and, towards seven o'clock, just as my uncle was going upstairs with his bottle and his two glasses, he met me in the lobby with my stick in my hand.

"Why, is this you, Kasper? where the deuce are you going so early this morning?"

"I am on my way to meet Waldhorn and the other comrades," said I. "The fairs are coming on, and we must take advantage of them. I may very probably be a month away."

"Ah! very good," said he. "Don't forget the two arpents of vines!"

"Don't be uneasy about that, uncle. I shan't forget them."

And having shaken hands with him, I went downstairs. In the hall below, Margredel, who seemed impatient for Yeri's appearance, was passing with the coffee-pot in her hand. My knees bent under me, and in a trembling voice—

"Good-bye, Margredel," said I.

"Oh! is it you, Kasper?"

"Yes, it is I. Good-bye, Margredel."

"Why? are you going away?"

"Yes; I am going away—for some time."

And I looked her steadily in the face. I could see by her agitation that she understood I was going away for good and all. As for me, I felt as if my heart

would burst. I could not utter a word more. At last, endeavouring to steady my voice, I said—

“God bless you—may you be happy when I am far away!”

She gave a slight gasp.

“Kasper!” said she.

But she didn’t say a word more. And, as I waited, she added in a very low voice—

“I shall always love you like a brother, Kasper!”

Then, no longer able to contain myself, I caught her head between my two hands, and kissed her on the forehead.

“Yes—yes—I know that!” said I, lowering my voice. “That is why I am going—I must go—away. Ah! Margredel, my heart is breaking!”

And saying this I ran out on the steps. I fancied I heard a voice calling behind me, “Kasper! Kasper!”

But I can’t be sure. Perhaps it may have been my own sobs that I heard.

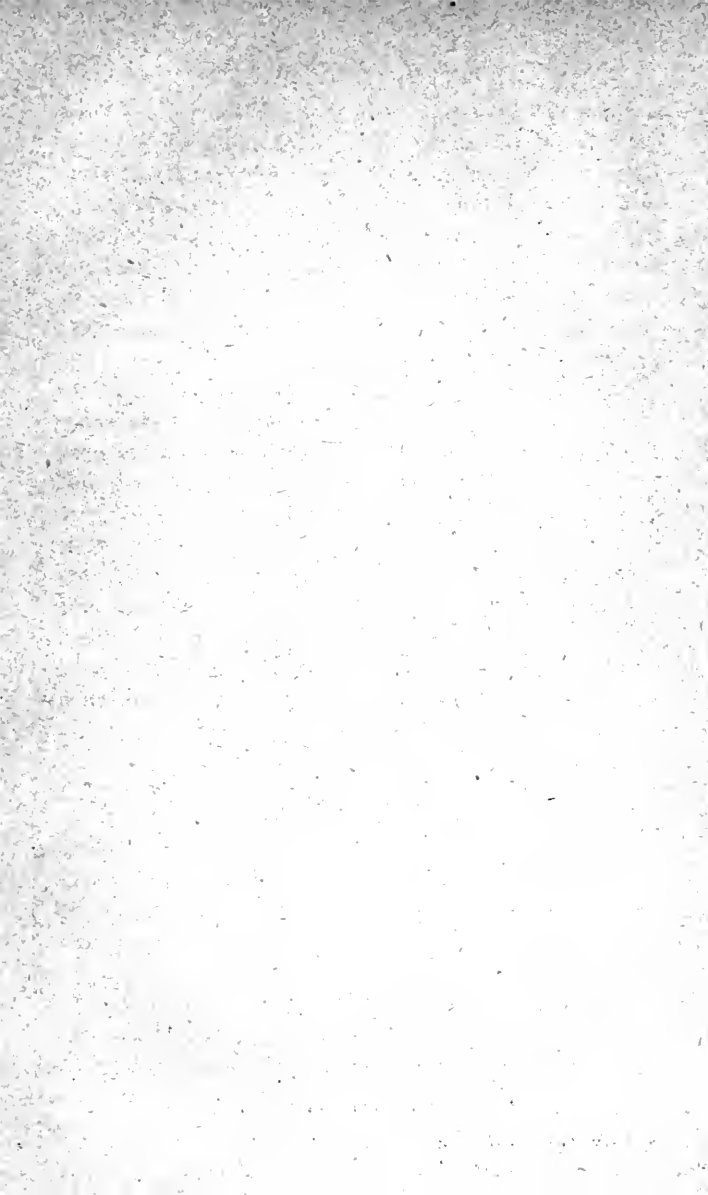
There was no one in the street, and I reached the Three Pigeons without any one having been a witness of my tears.

The same day I set out with Waldhorn and the comrades for Saint Hippolyte, and my story is at an end! But stay! about six weeks after, at the beginning of winter, being at Wasselone, I received a letter from Uncle Conrad. Here it is; I have kept it carefully:—

“MY DEAR NEPHEW KASPER,—You must know in the first place that the vintage is over, and that we have one hundred and twenty-three pipes of wine in the cellar. We had a pretty hard job of it; but now, thank goodness, all is settled nicely. Of the hundred



"I shall always love you like a brother, Kasper."



and twenty-three pipes, nineteen are for you; I have put them apart in the little cellar, under the presser. It's a very fair wine, with a good body, and will keep well. Meriâne came one day to offer me thirty francs the pipe for it, before it was ever in the vat; but I refused. If it is worth thirty francs the pipe to Meriâne, it is worth the same to us. I'm not at all anxious to sell. In three or four years that wine will have improved greatly, and we shall see then.

"But that's not what I wanted to say to you. You must know, Kasper, that since you left us a great many things have come to pass. Father Yeri has been here to ask me for Margredel in marriage for his son, and Margredel has consented. There's the whole affair in two words. As for me, I said I had given my word to you, and I would keep it no matter what happened. I don't want to conceal from you that Yeri-Hans is a fine honest-hearted young fellow; so, if you don't want to place me in a very awkward position, you will come back as soon as possible. At all events let me have your answer one way or the other.

"With best love, I am,

"Your uncle, CONRAD STAVOLO."

To this I replied that I loved Margredel too well to make her unhappy, and that Yeri-Hans might marry her since he had her love. What it cost me to write this letter and send it off, I cannot think of even now without trembling.

That winter was a very sad one to me. But the spring time comes round, nevertheless, every year with the song of the lark and the early flowers. And when I looked up at the lovely blue sky, when I felt the

gentle warmth steal, as it were, into my heart, when I watched the last patches of snow melting behind the hedges, then I felt that, after all, life was a blessing, and I lifted up my voice in praise to God for all His mercies.

One day in the early part of spring, Waldhorn, with his cornet slung about his shoulders, and I, with my clarionet under my arm, were following the little by-road, bordered with elders, leading from Saint Hippolyte to Saint-Marie-aux-Mines. I was thinking of Margredel, of Uncle Conrad, of home, of the whole village. I would have liked to return, if it were only for one day, just to get a distant peep of the country, the mountains, the hills.

"What are they all doing now, I wonder?" I kept saying to myself. "What is Margredel thinking of at this moment?—and Unele Stavolo, and—the other?"

I was walking on, with my head drooping on my breast, when all at once Waldhorn said—

"Kasper, you may remember, towards the end of last autumn, at Eckerswir, my speaking to you about Margredel Stavolo. Well, you must know that she and Yeri had been attached to each other for a long time before."

And as I listened without making any reply, he went on—

"You knew Waldine? She is one of us—a gipsy. Well, she told me that from the time of that fête at Kirschberg she used constantly to carry messages between Margredel and Yeri-Hans. When there was no one in the house, Margredel would put a pot of reseda in the window opposite the steps, and Waldine would come in. That was the plan they had agreed upon."

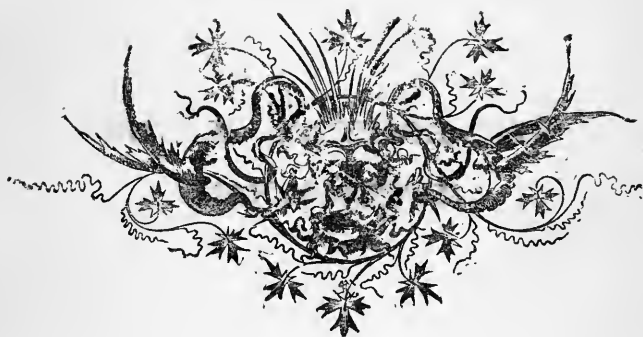
"Why did you not tell me that at the time?" said I to Waldhorn.

"Bah!" said he. "What is to happen will happen. If Margredel liked the artilleryman better than you, it was quite natural that she should marry him. It's much better for every one. She would only have made you unhappy; and then, if you had got married, Kasper, I could never have got another clarionet anything like as good as you. So you see everything has happened for the best; as it is, we'll play together and tramp the roads side by side to the end of our days."





THE HOSTELRY OF THE
MAYENCE HAM,





THE HOSTELRY OF THE MAYENCE HAM.

CHAPTER I.



FROM nine in the morning until six in the evening did Frantz Sebald Dick, landlord of the tavern called the Mayence Ham, at Bergzabern, owner of a mill at Fromulde, meadows at Eichmatt, vineyards at Rôthalps, Frankenthal, Gleiszeller, and other famous spots, entertain his friends and acquaintances to do honour to his new purchase of the Kilian vineyard.

The tavern of the Mayence Ham is situated at the bottom of the ancient court of the Trabans, which is entered by a gate opposite Saint Sylvester's Fountain. Its large straight roof reaches to within fifteen or twenty feet of the ground; a row of lofty and narrow windows with small round panes of glass give light to the interior, and open on the large court. From these windows, on the right, you can see the bowling alley

which runs along the crazy walls of the old synagogue; on the left, above the stables, occupied by a crowd of tinmen, cobblers, basket-makers, and other people of the same sort, you discover the numberless gables of the town, with their Gothic carvings, their waterspouts, grotesque weathercocks, and storks' nests; the red granite spire of the ancient cathedral, which seems to pierce the clouds, and in the distance the brow of the Frankenthal covered with vines, rising by degrees to the very top of the mountain. Up there it is all light, and when from the gloomy court below one looks up at the vinedressers with their hoes on their shoulders, climbing up the steep dry paths between the vines, or the girls in their short petticoats, with naked feet, dragging their asses loaded with manure from terrace to terrace, so high up, one's eyes become quite dazzled.

From the top of the mountain the distant courtyard, surrounded by the old buildings, looks like a well; for all that, the sun throws its golden rays on it as well, and the autumnal breeze drives the red leaves there, to be collected by poor old women to serve as litter for their goats.

It was, then, in the depth of this court that Master Sebald gave his entertainment, and it was something uncommon, something truly grand. I shall never be able to describe those long tables, covered with their white cloths, under the shade of the synagogue's walls, the vast round-bellied soup-tureens of painted china, the enormous dishes of beef, veal, sausages, and cabbage; pasties with gilded ornaments, boars' heads dressed in white wine, roast venison, oatmeal porridge and brown sugar, capons, crisp roasted sucking-pigs, chickens in jelly, pastry from Hunebourg, Ourmatt,

Emmenthal, and Hirschland cheeses, all of which were consumed on that memorable occasion.

Waiters in their shirt-sleeves, with leather aprons, hurried round the tables with their jugs, filling the glasses with Deidesheimer, Gleiszeller, Musteiner, or Bodenheimer, according to the taste of the guests; glasses rang, cans tinkled, bottles clinked, joy and contentment were depicted on every face. The band from the Sour Herring, as well as those from the Three Puddings and the Fat Ox, played together on lofty stages which reached the roof; the sun warmed the air, it was pleasant to refresh oneself, and each man with red cheeks, grey eyes, and moist lips ate and drank, talked and laughed, and called out—

“Long live Master Sebald! All honour to Master Sebald!”

The whole town of Bergzabern was present at this feast; all the roofs overlooking the court were crowded with heads looking on at the proceedings and snuffing up the smell of the smoking dishes, and expressing their surprise that Master Sebald had invited so many low people when respectable burghers would willingly have honoured him with their presence.

They were indignant at seeing Toubac, the copper-smith; Hans Aden, the dealer in tinder; Karl Beutz, the basket-maker; the veterinary surgeon, Nickel Finck; Bevel Heuné, the wool-comber; Trievel Rasimus, the darning of stockings; the cobbler, Ildes Jacob; Paul Borbès, the knife-grinder; and a hundred other ragamuffins, with their caps on one ear, broken hats, coats out at elbows, torn shirts, shoes down at heel, petticoats in rags—to see them, I say, swallowing roast larks, wings of capons, and bumpers of Deidesheimer, as if

they had done nothing else all their lives, and then unbuttoning their waistbands to be able to stuff themselves more at their ease with creams, "kougelhof," cakes, preserves, and all sorts of delicacies.

"Look at the beggars," said they, "how they are eating! Look! isn't it abominable? They have had fifty dishes one after the other, while respectable people would have been satisfied with a dish of sour-kraut, and an omelette on Sundays. They deserve hanging, and all the time the music is playing to amuse them."

But these remarks offered no hindrance to the course of the banquet, neither did they prevent the guests from emptying more bottles, laughing more heartily than ever, or the orchestra from playing its gayest and loudest. The musicians on their benches had three waiters to attend to them who were continually going up and down the benches with jugs in their hands. After blowing through their trombones, their horns, and their clarionets till their throats were dry, they had a bumper of wine poured out fresh to keep them in breath—they, the Volfort of Rastadt, the Lutzesteiner, the sledge-driver, the three Hopser of Pirmasens, and the Lendlers of Creutznach. The orchestra was led by old Rosselkasten; he looked like the devil in propriâ personâ when he lifted his bow in the air, thrust one leg forward, and gesticulated right and left.

About three there was nothing to be distinguished but a confused noise of laughing, snatches of music, stamping on the floor, hoarse cries, and expressions of satisfaction. Toubac amused himself by pinching old Rasimus, Hans Aden bawled out the pilgrim's song. At the end of the long middle table sat Christian the painter, with his black velvet cap over his ear, his large

blue eyes full of tears, ogling little Fridoline Dick, as fresh as a wild rose, who blushed and looked modestly down. Master Sebald, sitting opposite the capuchin Johannes at the other end of the table, his cheeks crimson, his triple chin swelled up like a cock turkey's, his arms bared to the elbows, his vast stomach resting on his knees, his round projecting eyes and his large nose of the finest vermilion possible to see, laughed loudly enough to make the windows near him shake, and called out as he held out his glass to the waiter—

“Go on, Kasper, go on, up to the brim. Ha! ha! drink! drink!”

And all the others repeated in chorus—

“Yes, yes! let us drink—we must drink!”

The worthy master of the tavern had an especial inclination for the red wine of the Rhinegau; he preferred it to any other: it went to his heart. His friend Johannes, on the contrary, liked the white Bodenheimer wine best, and, strange to tell, the more he drank the more gloomy he became; his temples were ploughed up with wrinkles, he laughed as he talked through his nose, and stammered out—

“That's right; now let loose Beelzebub's thirty-five thousand legions! may the race of Abimelech be confounded! may the angel of the Lord exterminate the firstborn of Egypt—ha! ha! ha!”

Then he made three or four grimaces, and rested his long under-jaw on his hairy fists.

The day was closing, but the slanting rays of the sun were not less hot. Most of the lookers-on had left the roofs, but some obstinately remained basking on the tiles. A few children had crept up to the tables, and some of

the guests gave them a drink from their glasses, or thrust cakes into their pockets. But Mother Rasimus quavered out—

“Ah, now, now I have really done. Toubac, I always loved you.”

“And so did I you, Trievel,” replied the brazier.

And then they leered at each other, while every one laughed at them.

So it was at all the tables, till at last the musicians lost their wind entirely, and even Rosselkasten’s vigour forsook him.

Now, when they thought the feast was at an end, several began to call out—

“Let us go and refresh ourselves with a glass of beer.”

When an enormous pasty made its appearance from the tavern, representing the castle of Rôthalps.

Four waiters bore it from the kitchen on a wide board, and Grédel Dick, who had put on her cap with pink ribbons in its honour, walked by its side in triumph; and while all the guests sighed as they looked at this fine pasty, Grédel’s chef-d’œuvre, as they reflected they never would be able to consume it, it was placed on the centre table, followed by two stuffed peacocks with their tails expanded, which formed a magnificent spectacle. The orchestra was mute, while Master Sebald, making his wife take her seat by his side, rose to speak.

The capuchin Johannes, his eyebrows meeting in a bush over his nose, his red beard, the hood of coarse cloth thrown back on his wide shoulders, looked at it with a dreamy squint, like a he-goat looking at the sun. All the rest of the guests, with their noses in the

air, were most attentive. Master Sebald coughed thrice, and then said in a deep resonant tone of voice—

“My dear companions, it is nearly twenty years we have led a jolly life together; we can boast of having drunk many a quart and many a pint together, thank God for it.

“I have always done my best to please everybody, to have the best wine, the best beer, the best black-puddings, sausages, hams, chitterlings, and, generally speaking, whatever could please people with a good conscience and in good health. By these means the tavern of the Mayence Ham is become famous on both sides of the Rhine from Strasbourg to Cologne. This, in the first place, is owing to me, Frantz Christian Sebald Dick, and next to you, my dear friends.

“Yes, for you have made the reputation of my tavern, and it shall go on increasing for ever—at least I hope so; for after me others of my family will succeed me who will never let it decay. I am, as it were, your field-marshal, my dear friends and companions; we have won many a battle together; I have carried off much booty from the battles we have fought—mills, meadows, vineyards, and you—you——”

Master Sebald, not knowing what to say the others had carried off, took his tankard in both his hands and drank a while to recover his ideas. After which, putting his cup on the table, he added, shouting with laughter—

“And you—you have covered yourselves with glory—ha! ha! ha!”

This did not please everybody, and several thought he intended a joke at their expense. However, no one

opened his mouth, and the tavern-keeper, enchanted at his own eloquence, continued his address:—

“Look there, my dear comrades, look there. You can see the Frankenthal vines, and those of Lupersbach and Rôthalps; farther on those of Lauterbach and many others which you cannot see from here. Well, you have earned all that for Frantz Christian Sebaldus Dick. Is there in all Bergzabern a single burgher who can make the same boast? Not even the burgomaster Omacht; I tell you he has not half nor a quarter as much.

“And this tavern, the largest, and with the best cellar of wine in the place, whose is it? And my wife, Grédel Dick, the best cook in the Rheingau, and my daughter Fridoline, and my own good constitution? As for friends, I do not mention them. Thank God, friends are not wanting when I give a feast; when I treat them to cock-fights, and dinners, and galas, I see them coming by dozens—ha! ha! like sparrows in the corn, like chaffinches in flax; they have always two-and-thirty teeth and an empty bag at your service.

“Therefore I may justly say I am beloved of the Lord, for——”

At that moment the capuchin Johannes, whose cheeks, nose, and even his ears had been quivering ever since the beginning of this fine speech, called out—

“Master Sebald, you are to blame in letting your vanity display itself as you are now doing—it is not Christian-like.”

“Christian!” said the tavern-keeper, in a rage at being interrupted; “much do I care about being a Christian. Such as you see me now, I never respected anything but the sun,”

"The sun?" said Johannes, shrugging his shoulders; "why, you are a pagan; you believe neither in our holy religion nor in the prophets nor the apostles, nor in the coming of our Lord! You have neither law nor Gospel; you worship the onions, turnips, cabbages, and cows of Egypt; you are an Amalekite, a Moabite, a Midianite, a Philistine!"

Every one pricked up his ears at this.

"No," replied Master Sebald, "I worship neither onions, nor turnips, nor cabbages; I prefer black-puddings and chitterlings; but that does not prevent my respecting my god the sun. At all events we can see him—we know what he does for us. In winter, while he is absent, we are all shivering; in springtime, when he returns, we dance, and laugh, and sing; birds, fishes, four-footed animals, and men themselves, even the cockchafers—yes, the cockchafers rejoice to see him again. He gives us rain and sunshine; without him my fields and my vines would not bring me in a farthing; I hold by my god the sun!"

"Why do you go to church on Sundays?" replied Johannes in disgust.

"On account of my daughter Fridoline, to give her a good example. But as for me, I say one must be blind or wrong in the head to believe in aught else but the sun."

"And what are we, then?" yelled the capuchin. "Are we nothing but liars and hypocrites?"

"No, you are gormandisers," replied the fat tavern-keeper in a bantering tone.

Then the whole court burst into shouts of laughter; they held their sides as they sat at table, they rolled in their seats, some laughed till the tears ran down their

cheeks, and Sebald, patting his enormous paunch with both hands, cried—

“Ha! ha! If ever I spoke the truth I did so just now.”

But Father Johannes, he did not laugh; he was quarrelsome in his cups, especially after drinking white wine. After looking at the crowd laughing at his expense for some minutes, his grey eyes nearly closed, then he rose, while his lips trembled. They thought he was going to leave the place, and several were chuckling over his discomfiture; but he, stepping behind Sebald's chair, grasped his long blackthorn cudgel in both hands, and discharged such a blow across the fleshy loins of the latter, that all present were frightened. Not content with that, he continued to belabour him until Master Sebald, who had been giving himself airs, began to cry out in most lamentable tones—

“Help! he is killing me! Help me, help me!”

Then they all called out—

“Knock the capuchin down! Down with the priests!”

But Johannes, as he backed towards the Trabans Gate, did not seem at all frightened at these cries.

He seemed inspired with a holy rage, and brandished his great cudgel as if it was a walking-cane. Dishes, plates, and jugs were hurled at him by dozens. Some, indignant at the pride of their host, took the terrible monk's side, others ran away, the women screamed. Fridoline sobbed in Christian's arms, Grédel untied her husband's cravat, and, seeing his back covered with bruises, lifted her hands to heaven as if to implore Divine vengeance on the head of Johannes. Sebald himself said not a word, quite astounded; wine was running

down his legs, into his sleeves, and even into his pockets; he tried to murmur something which was unintelligible. The threefold layers of fat on his ribs alone saved them from being broken.

Toubac, Hans Aden, old Mother Rasimus, all the cobblers, basket-makers, braziers, and knife-grinders, set off in pursuit of Johannes. Under the arch of the Trabans' gateway there was a terrible fight. Toubac having got too near the priest's tremendous cudgel, received a blow on the ear which sent him on his back in one corner, Paul Borbès was in a similar state, and old Rasimus, with nearly all her grey hairs torn from her head, retired slowly from the fray, dragging her rags after her. When Sebald came to himself again, he saw Father Johannes at a distance fighting as he retreated, knocking people down with his club like the exterminating angel.

"Ah! dog of a capuchin!" cried he, "the next time you come asking me to fill your donkey's panniers with eggs, butter, cheese, and black puddings, you shall have them—yes, you shall have them!"

In about a quarter of an hour the defenders of the sun remained masters of the field of battle. But what a sight, what a scene of havoc—windows smashed, tables upset, men hobbling about, the great pasty and the peacocks on the ground, and jugs, plates, and dishes in a thousand pieces! Go and give dinners like Balthazar's feast to cobblers, tinmen, and capuchins—treat them to Forstheimer, Pleiszeller, and Umsteiner—Heaven keep us from such friends as these!

But the worst was to come. All Bergzabern laughed at the general break up, and said respectable people could only be glad when scamps and ragamuffins exterminated one another.

CHAPTER II.



ND this was how two old comrades like Father Johannes and Master Sebald suddenly fell out about the sun's divinity, who took no heed whatever of either, but fulfilled his daily task without attending to them. Which proves ideas divide mankind much more than facts; for facts we see, we hear, and we touch, sometimes we enjoy them, while as for ideas every one forms his own according to his own temperament, or maybe even from the colour of the wine he has been drinking. Which farther proves that one ought always to drink the same wine as one's friends if one wishes to keep always on good terms with them.

For twenty years Father Johannes used every morning to go up the street of the Trabans (or halberdiers), and a gleam of satisfaction would light up his goat's visage at the sight of the gateway; for there stood Master Sebald on the threshold of the smoky old tavern, waiting for him in his shirt-sleeves, and holding out his hand to him. He would call out, "Good morning, Father Johannes," when he saw him a good way off, "how are you this morning? How are you after the chitterlings you had for supper last night?" "Well, very well indeed, Master Sebaldus," the capuchin would gaily answer, "Mistress Grédel is without a rival for dressing chitterlings. All night I have been licking my moustaches, and your Umsteiner makes a famous sauce for them, ha! ha! ha!"

Then they both used to shake hands. They entered the tavern; Father Johannes set his stick behind the

door, and Master Sebald would shout out—"Grédel! Grédel! Father Johannes is come—you can bring the fry in. Come, Father Johannes, sit down, and I will go and draw a pint of wine. It is very hot this morning—we must provide against it beforehand."

And then the fat old fellow, caressing his stomach with both hands, would turn to the right to the cellar stairs, under the wormeaten gallery, while Mistress Grédel opened the kitchen door, crying out, "Welcome, welcome," to Father Johannes—one could hear the butter in the frying-pan, and see the flames on the hearth.

Father Johannes would take a seat all smiles and good-humour, and Mistress Grédel would hurry in with a large dish of professor's wurst, violet-coloured, and covered with small specks of white from the boiling grease in which they had been cooked. Master Sebald would come up from the gloom of his cellar with a jug in his fist and set it before his old crony, and say, as he drew a long breath after climbing up the cellar stairs—

"Now then to breakfast, Father Johannes. Grédel, fetch us some mugs. You must just give me your opinion of that wine; it is that light-coloured wine we made six years ago; it improves every day. When I went to my cellar under the Schlossgarten the day before yesterday, I saw it and knew it again; it is something delicious!" and he would kiss the tips of his fingers with a beatified air.

"We shall soon see," the capuchin would say, as he turned up his great moustaches.

Then Master Sebald would slacken his waistband and seize on a fork. Soon after Fridoline would make

her appearance from the old gallery where she had an apartment to herself; she used to lean over the banisters, her eyes half open, a little white cap tied under her rosy chin, and a handkerchief crossed over her bosom—

“Good morning, Father Johannes; I wish you a good appetite, Papa Sebald.”

Then both would look up, the long beard of the one and the fat cheeks of the other shining with grease, and reply together—

“Good morning, my child—good morning! Take a drop of wine; these professor’s sausages are delicious!”

She came down and embraced them both.

How fond they were of that child! How many times had Father Johannes taken her with him on his donkey Polak when he went his rounds! how often had he nursed her with his great hairy hands! When she was quite little he carried her about with him for hours on the wide sleeves of his coarse brown gown, she resting her little rosy cheek against his tanned face, and her delicate little hands buried in his tawny beard, he as happy as possible, and his face glowing with internal satisfaction. In this way he used to take her about Bergzabern with him, and about the country, pointing out to her the distant blue line of the Rhine as it disappeared in the verdant plains, and from the heights of the Bocksberg innumerable villages, the old town with its square cross, the small yards, the stalls and hovels; then when they came back he showed her old Mother Rasimus feeding her rabbits, Toubac mending pots and kettles, and old Bével wool-spinning. He stopped at the windows as they went along to please her and give her an idea of what she saw. How

he loved that child, the tavern, and Sebald himself, and how they loved him! All Fridoline's recollections were mixed up with the kindly explanations of the old capuchin; she saw and thought of him always, and believed he was a part of the family.

After breakfast, about seven in summer and eight in the winter, other acquaintances of the Mayence Ham generally made their appearance: Hans Aden, Toubac, Borbès, and old Rasimus—sometimes on fête days all together, but usually one after the other as they finished their work. They had a drop at the counter, and a plate of saurkraut; customers came and went out—those who had nothing to do played at rams or youker, or else at ninepins in the yard; then they went to dinner.

Christian, the painter, the best-favoured lad in Bergzabern, with his little cap and his Polish pelisse, fitting tight to his waist, quick eye, white teeth, and small light moustache curled upwards, came there habitually about five in the evening, making the heels of his boots sound on the flagstones of the court, and whistling gently—"I love you, I love you, my pretty white dove." Fridoline, in her own little room under the roof, saw him coming from behind her flowerpots, so laying her work down she hurried down into the tavern, and there she was behind the counter as he came in.

"Ha!" cried the young fellow, "good evening, Father Johannes, Master Sebald, and all friends! Just one glass, Mamma Grédel, if you please!"

"Ah! there's the boy at last," said Johannes; "so much the better; I began to think he was not coming this evening, and that disappointed me."

He had just one look at Fridoline, who blushed up to her ears. Christian shook hands with every one, then leaning over the shoulders of the old capuchin he appeared to be looking at Toubac's cards, or Hans Aden's, or anything else, while in reality he never took his eyes off dear Fridoline, who dropped her long eyelashes on her cheeks very demurely. They seldom parted before midnight, and Father Johannes was always the last to set off with his great tin lantern for his hermitage at Luppertsberg,

I do not mention either the cock-fights or the bear-baitings, or the flights of larks in the autumn, sack races, asparagus feasts, or the vintages; of course in those days it was something more than common, and old Rasimus distinguished herself on such occasions by dancing the "Hopser" of Lutzelstein with Toubac.

Such was their everyday life—easy, plentiful, a really prosperous existence, and which promised to be lasting also, to the satisfaction of every one.

But to return to the great battle. That night Master Sebald, in his indignation, called Father Johannes an ill-conditioned varlet, a blackguard, a gallows-bird, a pauper, and a gormandising glutton; he never could abuse him enough, and returned to the charge continually. Toubac, Rasimus, and the rest of them, as they sat at the table in the tavern, never left off bragging about their victory, and swallowed their beer with enthusiasm.

However, about four in the morning some of them were taken unwell in consequence, and went to sleep with their noses in their mug; others were just able to stagger home. They could be heard a long way off knocking at their doors, and their neighbours open

their windows and swear at them, while barking dogs and crowing cocks heralded the approach of day.

Sebald, seated behind the counter with staring eyes and flaccid cheeks, took it into his head he felt the cold air too much, for the windows had remained open, and the fog of the morning came into the room; so he thought he would go to bed, but judge his consternation when he found himself as stiff as a log of firewood; most dreadful pains went along his back from the nape of his neck downwards.

"Good Lord!" cried he, "what can be the matter with me?"

He made a second attempt to rise, but the pain was so great that he began to cry—

"Grédel! O Lord, what pain I am in! That beggarly capuchin has broken my back. Oh, I shall die!"

His cheeks became purple; he panted, shut his eyes, and called out—

"O Lord! have pity on me!"

The remaining guests woke up and looked as stupid and astonished as those at Belshazzar's feast.

Grédel ran in crying—

"Sebald! Sebald! what's the matter?"

"Don't touch me, don't touch me," groaned poor Sebald; "when I am touched I feel as if I was being beaten over again. God of Heaven! to think I can move neither hand nor foot; some one must help me now even when I want to drink. Ah, good Lord! if I was only sure I should ever get better! Grédel, Grédel, go and fetch Doctor Eselskopf (literally ass's head) directly. Ah, you thief of a capuchin that I have fed so long! The devil fly away with the sun! What do I care for the sun?"


He called out so loudly and made such a noise that his friends and Toubac were quite frightened; old Rasimus alone kept her wits about her, and thrusting her grey hair back under her cap, she took a good pinch out of her pasteboard snuff-box, and observed most philosophically—

“The poor man is in pain all over. Do not alarm yourself, Mistress Grédel, don’t be frightened; the marks of the blows from the priest’s cudgel are to be seen on his back plain enough; stay at home and make a linseed poultice; I will go and call up Eselskopf; he is sure to put on him bandages soaked in brandy—that is the best remedy for a beating. I know it by experience.”

And out she went, murmuring—

“Good heavens, how tender those fat men are! I could have taken ten times as much without crying ‘Oh!’ That is the consequence of having such a white shining skin, like an ortolan.”

CHAPTER III.

AY was beginning to light up the ruinous-looking gable ends of the houses as Triebel Rasimus, gathering her rags about her, with her head hanging down, and the fringe of her cap falling over her red nose, trotted like an old hare along the lane of the Pot-Cassé, indistinctly muttering—

“What a treat we have had! My lord! what a feast! and I had my share of it,” continued she. “What a windfall! we shall have to wait now for six weeks, when

the vintage begins. Potatoes, carrots, and turnips will soon be here now; how I hate turnips! I cannot bear the smell of them. When I think there are people who can have omelettes and bacon, sour herrings and dried codfish every day for dinner, and whose life is one long feast! Only think!"

Then she began to muse aloud—

"Toubac has taken to me, that's clear," said she to herself. "I have captivated him, no doubt; I must get a firm hold on him and make him marry me. Then I shall be well off; he shall work like the water-dog of Hans the nailer, while I will quietly make my coffee every day by the fireside, and sit and roast chestnuts with Mother Schmutz and Mademoisalle Schlapp, with a nice footwarmer under my petticoats, while Toubac is mending his pots and pans, and freezing outside. And so it ought to be—when one worships beauty one must make sacrifices accordingly."

And the old woman, as she made these reflections, twisted herself about and smiled in her grey beard; she fancied she already held the tinker in her talons.

Ten minutes afterwards Triewel Rasimus entered the Kapougnierstras, opposite a narrow house, with the two windows on the ground floor barred, and five or six uneven steps before the door.

"Here we are," said she.

She drew her snuff-box from her pocket and took a pinch, wiped her moustaches with her sleeve, and then scrambled up the steps of the house; she gave three blows with the knocker, which sounded far and wide in the silent streets.

She soon heard some one moving about the house.

"Eselkopf is putting on his slippers and his green

dressing-gown; he is afraid of catching cold," thought the old woman, winking her eye.

Then she listened, and hearing nothing she began knocking again, when a window on the first floor was opened, and a long lean yellow head, with a narrow forehead and hollow cheeks, surmounted by a pyramidal cotton nightcap, a large woollen comforter round a neck like a giraffe's, and a pair of shoulders protected by a green dressing-gown with large yellow flowers—in short, the head, the neck, the skinny arms of Doctor Eselskopf were protruded from the window. The worthy man, looking down into the street, began by saying—

"Who are you? What do you want? You must not stand knocking there until to-morrow—I am not deaf!"

"I beg your pardon, Doctor Eselskopf," said the old woman, "but you must come to Master Sebald Dick directly, at the Mayence Ham."

"Is Master Sebald ill?"

"Yes, doctor, his friend Johannes has given him such a thrashing that the poor dear man cannot move."

"Ah, ha! just as I expected," said Eselskopf, whose long yellow face was lighted up with a gleam of satisfaction. "The body burnt up by excess of alcohol, and now that the fire is beginning to declare itself he is obliged to send for me. Well, I will be there directly."

And Eselskopf left the window.

This doctor, the only one Bergzabern could boast, was as fond of water as Sebald was of wine. In fact, he had tried to get up a temperance society in the town as a set-off to drunkenness and excesses of the flesh. But the idea of founding a temperance society in a wine-growing country, and opposite the court of the Trabans!

With the exception of half-a-dozen victims to gout and gravel, and as many whimsical old maids, Eselskopf had made no proselytes. It was in vain he foretold the most frightful misfortunes to the friends of the Mayence Ham; not one of them was the least alarmed, and what was worse, they all continued to look as fat and as fresh, and to laugh and be as jolly as heretofore.

Master Eselskopf, who was as skinny as a cuckoo, and as yellow as a lemon, nourished a sort of secret grudge against Sebald, whose superabundant looks were a living criticism on his ideas about wine and good cheer. Judge then how pleased he was to hear that the fat man was in need of him at last; he triumphed in anticipation, and fancied he saw all the adherents of Bacchus already enlisted under his banner. While he was dressing, old Rasimus was thinking that a fire of spirituous liquors breaking out in one's stomach must be a terrible thing; and when, ten minutes after, the doctor stood at the door in his old black frieze coat, velvet breeches, silk stockings, and round-toed shoes with silver buckles, an ivory-headed cane in his hand, and his cocked hat on his head, she said to him in a tone of voice inviting him to make a confidant of her—

“Do you really think, Doctor Eselskopf, that Master Sebald has a fire in his body?”

“There is not the least doubt of it,” said he; “see the effects of intemperance; let it be a warning to you! How many times have I warned Master Sebald that he was casting himself into a gulf with neither bottom nor sides, through his abuse of wine and high living? Far from listening to my words, he always laughed at my healthful counsels, and was even so rude as to laugh in my face and call me a drinker of water, and an eater of

white cheese ! He will pray to God he had never eaten aught but white cheese, nor drank aught but water ! Instead of becoming so enormously corpulent, and having that purple face, which is a sign of impending apoplexy, he would now be in a most satisfactory state of health, and we should not now have to extinguish this general conflagration, which is nothing more nor less than a case of spontaneous combustion, as I have always foretold would take place.

“ When one thinks how much wine, how much beer, kirschwasser, and all sorts of spirituous liquors this man has consumed in the last twenty years, it is enough to make one shudder, and doubt whether all the waters of the Rhine and all the snows on the Mer de Glace could alleviate the internal inflammation which is now consuming him. It is incredible, it is something at once extraordinary and ominous. Well, I must do my best ; science has rendered it our painful duty to make the attempt. Should we be sufficiently fortunate to succeed it will be a wonderful cure, a marvel of its kind, and I shall send an account of it to all the medical schools in Europe.”

Eselskopf walked and talked in this fashion, addressing these reflections more to himself than to Triebel Rasimus.

The old woman, from what she could understand of the doctor's observations, looked upon Sebald as a dead man, and registered a private vow never to drink anything but water in future.

So they at last reached the court of the Trabans, where an unusual agitation reigned, for all Sebald's friends, at the news of his attack, had come thither still heavy from their drunken slumbers.

The tavern door stood open, people walked in and out, looked about them, told the same story over and over again, lifted their hands and eyes to heaven, cursed Johannes, and drank white wine to give themselves courage. Mistress Grédel wiped her eyes on her apron, while she gave an account of the battle to five or six female gossips who were hanging round her, while Christian, sitting inside the counter, was doing his best to console Fridoline, who was crying with all her might.

When Eselskopf and old Rasimus appeared under the archway a number of voices exclaimed—

“Here they are ! here they are !”

Eselskopf looked very serious ; as he crossed the court his eyes were caught by the tables at which Toubac and several others were tippling in the shade. At such a sight the worthy man seemed to feel horror-struck, and when he set his foot on the threshold of the Mayence Ham, halting for an instant, he said—

“Yes, here I am, here I am. When such people as these”—and he pointed to the winebibbers—“have passed ten, fifteen—nay, twenty years from morning till night in trifling with every poison in nature, and it at last happens to feel themselves all at once consumed by a burning fire in their entrails, which reaches even to the marrow in their bones, then in their distress they call out—‘Here he is ! here he is ! Save us !’ But we are not the Divinity, and what must burn, burns !”

He seemed inclined to go on speaking, but as Toubac quietly replied as he emptied his glass, “Your health, Mr. Eselskopf,” he only shook his head and asked for the sick man.

Poor Mistress Grédel, in tears, conducted him up the

old staircase of the tavern, and all her gossips followed her in a sort of religious meditation.

Sebald's bedchamber opened on to the head of the stairs in the ancient wormeaten gallery: it was a lofty and wide room lighted from the court by two windows. On the right was an old carved clothes-press with bright iron mountings; on the left a large canopied bed, with sky-blue curtains, and in this bed lay Sebald, his head raised up on pillows, and a pile of cushions under his back, only his purple nose and his great pumpkin-shaped cheeks being visible under a cotton nightcap. The fat man's face expressed consternation; he hardly saw Eselskopf enter before he groaned out—

“Save me, Mr. Eselskopf—you are my refuge in trouble; that beggarly capuchin has broken my bones; I cannot even turn my head. Ah, the vagabond! A man, too, that I loved like my own brother!”

Eselskopf, without saying a word, deposited his cocked hat in the window seat, and his cane in a corner; then, turning up his yellow ruffles, he slowly walked up to the bed and began to feel Master Sebald's pulse, who watched his motions with eyes of dread. The learned doctor, with his bald, narrow, cadaverous forehead, his staring eyes, his pinched-up lips, his chin buried in his white cravat, seemed absorbed in reflection.

Behind, Grédel, Toubac, Hans Aden, and a dozen old women waited, looking at each other. Fridoline was afraid to go upstairs for fear of hearing there were no hopes of her father's recovery. And as Eselskopf continued dumb, Sebald's terror increased every second. At last he could hold out no longer; he was just about to cry out—“Is there no chance for me?” when at last the doctor nodded his head.

"Latent fever, irregular pulse, sudden starting of the tendons, gastric symptoms, difficulty in breathing."

And so he went on, until Sebald, who grew paler at every symptom enumerated, cried out—

"Have I got every complaint that ever was known, then?"

"You have not all of them," said Eselskopf; "you are too used-up, exhausted—I may add too annihilated by the immoderate usage of strong drinks—to have them all, but you have a good half of them, and those the worst."

Sebald wanted to make an observation, but his tongue refused its office, and he could not utter a word.

"Ah!" said Mistress Grédel, "to think that horrid Father Johannes is the cause of it all!"

"No, Madame Dick, no," cried Eselskopf with dignity; "do not attribute your husband's present state to the blows he received from that man's cudgel. 'Give unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's.' The cause of this evil is long anterior to the events of last night. The cause of this evil, I repeat, dates fifteen, twenty, or perhaps thirty years back; all the liqueurs and all the wine Monsieur Dick has absorbed have sown in him the seeds of all sorts of complaints, so that in uniting these germs have formed in his body a sort of egg containing the seeds of every infirmity—a Pandora's box, in fact. Yesterday in that egg were contained the gout, gravel, sciatica, rheumatic affections of the joints, gastritis, serous apoplexy and blood to the head, general and partial paralysis, and a number of other diseases too long to enumerate now. All that was contained in the egg, Madame Dick; the

egg must be hatched sooner or later ; it might have gone on two or three, or six months, perhaps a year longer. I am not prepared to deny that the blows from Father Johannes' cudgel may have broken the egg, but the contents were there already, and the capuchin did not convey them thither ; it is Master Sebald lying here now who put them there and laid them himself."

"Is there no remedy, then?" cried Mistress Grédel, clasping her hands.

"Yes, Madame Dick, there is a remedy common to all complaints—a remedy which cures every disease, all human infirmities ; this remedy is the opposite of wine, which is the source of all misery ; it is water, Madame Dick—water, whose virtues ungrateful men ignore—it is to water we must have recourse."

And then Master Sebald, at last recovering his voice, said—

"If you can only cure me, I will drink water. Yes, I will drink, though I have been out of practice for a long time."

"You shall be cured," said Eselskopf firmly ; "but it may last some time, for to destroy the germs of disease you may have to drink as much water as you have wine. Now as you have drunk nothing but wine for the last twenty or thirty years, and sometimes six, seven, eight, or ten bottles a day, only just calculate the quantity of water you will have to drink."

Then the face of Sebald, who had begun to look a little relieved, became very gloomy, his cheeks sank, and he stammered out—

"Anyhow I cannot drink more than ten pints a day, and if that is to go on for thirty years I shall be too old to take to drinking wine again."

Eselskopf was very angry at this observation.

"Wine!" he cried; "are you still thinking about wine-drinking? In that case I have only to take my leave."

He had already taken up his hat and stick, when Grédel and all the spectators implored him to remain. He allowed himself to be persuaded, and ordered them to apply ice-water bandages immediately to Master Sebald's back, to be renewed every quarter of an hour. As for fluids, fresh water; and for all food, spinach, sorrel, and greens boiled in water. He interdicted potatoes as being too nourishing, and warned Grédel that the slightest infraction of this regime would infallibly kill Master Sebald, as surely as if it were poison.

Then he left the room in a most dignified manner, and I leave you to judge the grimace and reflections of Master Sebald when they put the ice-cold bandages on his back for the first time, and gave him his first glass of water to console him.

"Ah! gracious Lord!" cried he, "what have I done to deserve such a fate? Grédel! Grédel! this cold linen makes me shiver. I have lost all feeling. Oh, that villain Johannes! Eselskopf may say what he likes; had it not been for him that egg would have lasted a long time, and that wretch Johannes made it burst. And now all my past sins are reappearing by hundreds!"

And every time they gave him a glass of water the poor man made a horrible grimace.

"Water—always water!" he groaned. "I can stand it no longer, and it is water which alone can bring me round. If it was only red I could at least look at it;

but clear water, nothing to look at—my poor stomach is shivering! And then this spinach, this sorrel, and these boiled greens—always the same; I shall hate the sight of every green thing! Who ever would have believed I should come to this? I am sure if I could see my own face I should be frightened.”

The truth is the poor man became thinner every day; his fat melted away, his great nose became blue, and his triple chin disappeared and only left a sort of transparent frill which hung down on his breast.

“Never mind, Sebald, keep up your courage,” said his wife. “See, I have brought you what you like best, your own fine cabbage, instead of that sorrel, which sets your teeth on edge.”

“My cabbage, my fine cabbage! You are laughing at me, Grédel; it is a shame to joke with a poor sick man.”

“See now, Sebald, keep yourself quiet. If you get angry and complain after five days’ illness, what will you do when it has lasted five or six months? You must be patient.”

These judicious reflections so stupefied Sebald that he could not find words to answer; and sometimes when Fridoline, with her eyes red from crying, came to see him, he looked at her for a long time, and then a tear trickled slowly down his cheek.

“You see, my child, you see to what a state your poor father is reduced,” he used to murmur; “he is only the shadow of what he was, but a shadow who loves you very dearly, and who wishes to see you happy, my dear child. In my miserable state, with cold water on my back and only spinach in my stomach, I can still find strength to love you.”

Then the two began sobbing together ; it was quite heartbreaking.

As to Eselskopf, he came regularly twice a day, and when he saw Sebald growing thinner, weaker, and paler every day, he said—

“ Good, good ! going on well—very well indeed ! As the spinach and sorrel have such a good effect you must go on with them, and if the sorrel sets the sick man’s teeth on edge, confine yourselves to the spinach.”

It would be impossible to describe Sebald’s face when he heard all this. His eyes glared, his cheeks grew paler than ever ; he was choking with rage and indignation ; the sight of Eselskopf made him shiver ; he could not separate the idea of that man and cold water in his mind ; he hated both, and sometimes he fancied that Eselskopf was taking his revenge on him, which exasperated him to a degree it is not possible to describe.

CHAPTER IV.



THE report of these strange events, of the great battle, of the blows received, and of Master Sebald’s illness, had spread over the country, and then it was seen how many friends the worthy tavern-keeper had on the left bank of the Rhine.

In fact, the following Sunday a numerous crowd of people came to drink his wine and inquire after his health. They came from a distance of five, six, and even ten leagues. There were old men in periwigs, with bowed backs and crooked knees, with blue noses, wearing the old-fashioned cocked hat ; there were many

more young ones, and even some women who came from Pirmasens and Landau. All these good fellows met in procession under the arch of the Trabans' Gate; they shook hands quietly, and then took their way to the tavern, where Mistress Grédel received them with tears in her eyes, begging them to sit down at the long tables without making any noise, for Master Sebald could not bear to hear the gurgling of the bottles and the sound of knives and forks, since he drank nothing but water and was fed on vegetables.

About one, fifty or sixty of these good fellows afforded a very affecting scene; they were all drinking and talking with such decorum that it really brought tears into one's eyes. One extolled Sebald's kindness of heart, another his right way of thinking, and another his invariable good temper.

The old registrar, Frantz Schloute, the best judge of wine in the Rhinegau, told them how he saw him the day he came to Bergzabern, merely a journeyman wine-dresser; all he had in the world was his leathern apron, red waistcoat, and pruning-bill, but with plenty of good sense, and endowed with a great appetite and corresponding thirst; how he made a lucky marriage with Grédel Baltzer, cook at the grand hotel of the Eagle, through his love of red wine, ham, and veal patties, which was a proof, as he observed, of very great judgment on Sebald's part; how he first started in business in the Tanners' Lane, at the sign of the Three Herrings, where the charcoal-burners and timber-dealers first made his reputation; but afterwards, becoming more ambitious, he sold that small tavern in order to buy the property of the old synagogue, which was quite a stroke of genius, for since then his business

had gone on increasing every day, for every one now patronised the court of the Trabans.

“And since then, thanks be to Heaven,” added the worthy registrar, “the old court has been more run after than the church. You see,” said he, “good wine, good-humour, and good food give good digestion; now good digestion contributes more than three-fourths towards health, pleasure, and prosperity in this world.”

Every one acknowledged the truth of these remarks.

Then others related Master Sebald's exploits at the great meeting at the Bottle of Rudesheim. In such a year he vanquished all the vine-dressers, even the famous Sexomen from Neustadt. Another year he put all his adversaries under the table; a tun of wine had no terrors for him, for he ate in proportion to his liquor, which the others could not. Then they talked about his successful speculations, his vast stores, his cellar, the coolest in Bergzabern, and at last, just as three was struck at Saint Sylvester's Church, old Zaphéri Mutz proposed they should all go and see him; it would surely give him great pleasure; they would wish him a speedy recovery, and express their hope of seeing him soon back again among his old comrades, with a wine-can in his hand, which could not fail to do his heart good. They unanimously assented to this proposal; Mistress Grédel in vain assured them that he wanted rest.

“Nonsense,” said Zaphéri, “we know him of old; why, the pleasure of seeing us would go far towards setting him up again.”

So Grédel was very unwillingly obliged to go and tell Sebald that his old friends were coming to march round his bed and shake hands with him. Sebald had just swallowed his eighth pint of water when he was told

this news. He looked as broken and pale as the others were jolly and red-faced; his purple nose had acquired a violet tint, from internal chill; consternation was plainly visible in his eyes. Before he had time to say anything, the door opened, and his former jolly companions of old times filed in two by two, saying—

“Ha! ha! Master Sebald, how are you getting on? So you are ill at last!—that does not happen often!—never mind, it is not much!”

But hardly had they looked at him when their voices failed them; a cold shiver ran down their backs; several turned to the door to make their escape. Was it possible that a man so fat, so rosy, so fresh-looking only a week ago, could have been brought so low? It did not seem natural. The later arrivals pushed forward the others, and the room was soon full of these good livers, with open mouths and staring eyes, looking at him in silent terror.

Zaphéri Mutz had meditated a few words of encouragement to the sick man, but he had no courage to begin, and could only stammer out—

“Ah! that rascally capuchin! My poor Sebald, what a state he has put you in!—it makes my hair stand on end.”

“Yes, yes,” ejaculated poor Sebald, who was singularly frightened when he saw the stupefied look all their faces wore; “yes, it won’t last much longer—I cannot hold together—I am going—I am not even strong enough to cough—ho! ho! ho! what a misfortune, what a misfortune!”

“That scoundrelly capuchin!” cried several voices at once—“the miserable wretch! If we had been there it would never have happened!”

“Ah!” said Sebald, “he would have exterminated every one of you to the last man. You don’t know his power! It is the Lord Himself. It is the angel of the Lord who is punishing me for my numberless sins, my slothfulness, my drunkenness, my gluttony, and my blasphemies against His holy name. Father Johannes would never have had such strength of himself. His cudgel cut my back as if it had been a sword; and now here I lie—the Lord’s will be done—yes, sweet Jesus, Thy will be done! I do not repine—I acknowledge Thy justice—I renounce Satan, his pomps and vanities! It is all over—I know it well—the measure has been full for a long time—it has overflowed through my own fault—my very great fault. I blasphemed, and the tempests are let loose upon me!”

He spoke in this way through the horrible dread he had of dying; one might have sworn, looking at his clasped hands and violet nose, that he was already a saint in Paradise.

“Stuff!” said Zaphéri Mutz, who was as pale as death himself; “you will get over it, Master Sebald—you may still recover.”

“No, Zaphéri, no, I feel my end approaching. My only wish now is that you should profit by my example for your own conversion, for we all have been leading a very criminal life, and you must renounce the vain good things of the earth. Look at me—what does it advantage me now that I possess farms, vineyards, mills, cellars, old Rudesheim, Markobrunner, Johannisberg, and many other wines, which I had laid by for the gratification of my palate and the perdition of my soul? All that is as nothing now for Frantz Christian Sebald Dick. Alas! it is all vanity of vanities.”

They all began to cry when they heard this. Every one said—

“Master Sebald is a godly man; we never thought so before; he talks like a prophet!”

There could be nothing more edifying, especially when one recollected that only a week before the worthy tavern-keeper had declared that a man must be of weak intellect if he believed in anything but the divinity of the sun.

This is how such reflections, inspired by cold water, can bring a man back to healthier opinions, and this is why holy anchorites are always represented living on roots in the desert. It is a symbol—a sort of pictorial apologue.

Nevertheless the friends of the Mayence Ham were in consternation at such a change, and made very dismal reflections on their own account.

“The same thing may happen to us,” they thought; “all the wine we have been drinking may any day turn to vinegar with us too. Then, instead of being fresh and rosy, we shall collapse like an empty bladder, which will be for each of us in particular, and for all of us in general, the abomination of desolation prophesied by the Holy Scriptures.”

Now these reflections, though very judicious, did not seem very lively; on the contrary they became consequently very melancholy; they all, one after the other, stole quietly out of the room, went downstairs into the court, and thence into the street, and walked off with heads down without looking right or left. At the end of twenty minutes Master Sebald was alone in his room with old Rasimus and Grédel, who plied their knitting in silence, Christian, who was in a reverie, and little Fridoline,

who had cried so much that she had no more tears to shed. All the old comrades were gone, which proves that if flax when green attracts the sparrows and the chaffinches, the scarecrow of misfortune soon frightens them away.

CHAPTER V.



THE desertion of Master Sebald by his friends had a strange effect in Bergzabern; a report was spread that Eselskopf's prophecies had been fulfilled, and that the worthy tavern-keeper, from his former excesses, had fallen into an incurable state of depression; that he had fallen away to a skeleton; that he was dying, that he drivelled, and was melting away like butter before the fire. Good people therefore ascribed the effects of the deplorable regime of cold water and vegetables to red wine. The temperance society at last began to look up, the adherents of wine were dismayed, and Eselskopf, thanks to his perseverance, triumphed all along the line.

Farewell to cock-fighting and bear-baiting, farewell to the fêtes of St. Magloire, St. Pancrace, St. Boniface, St. Crispin, St. Cyprian, and all those saints in the calendar whose days Master Sebald used to celebrate with such magnificence. Farewell to asparagus and vintage feasts; no more sack races, no more drinking bouts in autumn—farewell to them all.

“Now it is all over,” said the true supporters of the Mayence Ham—the basket-makers, nailers, cobblers, old men, tinkers, tinder-sellers, Hans Aden, Toubac, Paul Borbès, and a hundred others to whom the

ancient and respectable tavern had become a second existence. Desolation was among them, consternation painted on their faces. Far from forsaking Master Sebald, they relieved one another in the great room, speaking in whispers, discussing the prescriptions, asking for hourly information about the sick man's health, wiping their eyes with their coat-sleeves every time there was a change for the better, and in despair when he had passed a bad night.

Mother Rasimus alone was allowed to sit up with the patient. Every time she peeped out of the door opening on to the old wormeaten gallery, they made signs to her to come down; then she drew her rags about her, and throwing back her tattered cap-ribbons she leaned over the balustrade and whispered that he was better, or worse, he would not take any more sorrel—he was in a rage with Eselskopf.

Such were the reports from morning till night in the ancient synagogue yard, and which made these poor devils either rejoice or lament.

As long as Master Sebald suffered the pains in his back and loins arising from the blows of Father Johannes' cudgel, which lasted nearly a fortnight, he submitted most resignedly to the doctor's treatment; but very shortly the sight of Eselskopf's face became hateful to him. At every visit he turned his face to the wall that he might not see him; and when he heard him repeat every day, "He is going on well, continue the vegetables," his indignation waxed greater and greater. But what drove him to despair more than anything was when one evening Eselskopf, remarking his excessive paleness and his vacant look, began to smile, and showing his yellow teeth, said—

“Monsieur Dick, I will answer for your recovery at last; you are in a fair way to get about again; one or two months of the same regime, and all your fluids will be in equilibrium, your other complaints will have disappeared, and you will have such a waist as this.”

Eselskopf pinched himself above the hips with his long bony fingers with an air of admiration at his own waist.

“Go to the devil!” muttered Sebald as he turned himself round in despair.

All night he never closed an eye. He fancied he saw himself as lean as Eselskopf, and dared not raise his eyes.

“How can I ever show myself again before decent people?” said he to himself. “What must they think of me? All those I knew before will point their fingers at me—I shall be obliged to hide myself. The little tailor will seem a giant compared with me, and old Diederich Sauffer can knock me down with a tap on the nose. I would rather die than be exposed to such affronts!”

Now in the course of the morning Trievel Rasimus came as usual to relieve Grédel after sitting up all night. For some time she had changed her mind about Eselskopf; she thought him an ass; and the fear with which she had at first regarded him had been quite dissipated.

“That rascal,” said she to herself, raising her apron and taking a long wicker-covered bottle out of her pocket—“that rascal Eselskopf, he has bewitched them all. And I, too, I must take to drinking water—he! he! he! Yes, my poor Trievel, I will treat you to some water, to clear your complexion, I will.”

Then she put the bottle to her lips and took a most satisfactory draught, then smacked her lips and slipped the bottle back into her pocket.

“Very good spring water!”

Then she began to twist herself about as if she was dancing a “Hopser” with Toubac. But she was careful not to utter a syllable of her opinion about Eselskopf to Mistress Grédel, who looked on him as an oracle.

“Not so silly as that comes to,” thought she; “they would turn me out of the house, and I could be of no farther service to Master Sebald, who is the best of good fellows—poor dear man, he is only skin and bone. What ought he to have? Some good beef-tea to put some life into him. So they give him a glass of cold water instead. Oh! that rascal Eselskopf, he is worse than the capuchin’s cudgel!”

So that morning Triebel Rasimus sat knitting and pondering as usual in the window corner. A splendid ray of purple and golden sunlight shone on the panes through the foliage of a lofty acacia which grew in the court; a flock of noisy sparrows were quarrelling; you could hear them chattering, squabbling, and then fly away at the least noise. The old woman thrust her knitting-needles through her grey hair, then looked to see what was going on on the tiles. She noticed the cat belonging to her neighbour Yeri-Peter—a great tortoiseshell cat—going her morning rounds at the garret windows; the lovely white clouds sailing along in the blue sky; she thought of the coming vintage; then she looked at Master Sebald under the shadow of the bed canopy, and began her work once more.

Sometimes the jingle of bottles and glasses reached

the room though the door was closed, and Mistress Grédel begged her customers to make as little noise as possible. Then the sick man raised his eyelids, listened, gave a long-drawn sigh, and threw a glance of dismay at the water-bottle on the chimney between two large clean glasses.

“Horrible!” he murmured—“horrible!”

For a moment he could hold out no longer; he made an attempt to draw the curtain, and seeing the old woman sitting there all alone, he began by saying—

“I should like to be buried under the Schlossgarten. I have had enough of spinach and sorrel already. Look here, Trievel, as my wife and Fridoline are not here, I don’t mind saying so to you—I would rather die at once than go on water-drinking. I have done it long enough. If it is to come to an end, if I am never to go down into the tavern again, unless I go there feet foremost—well, I should prefer finishing at once with a bottle of Rudesheimer or Johannisberg; that would, at all events, be a death worthy of Sebald Dick. But to die of water-drinking—fie! Only when I think of it, it makes me sick. There was a time when I would have broken a jug on any man’s head who dared to hint at such a thing!”

The good man spoke in such a tone of conviction, and in such pathetic accents, that Trievel Rasimus was moved. He turned round, they looked at one another for two or three seconds most expressively, then the old woman got up, laid her knitting down in the window seat, and gently opened the door. He could see across the gallery, in the obscurity of the tavern, Hans Aden, Toubac, and several others, sitting with their elbows on the table, looking very melancholy, and emptying their

glasses in silence, Mistress Grédel sitting pensively with her hands on her knees behind the counter, and Fridoline close to her; then when she felt sure of not being interrupted, she walked up to the bed and smiled at Master Sebald with a curious look on her face.

"Wine," she began; "good Lord! Give you wine, did you say? Why, it would be your death, Master Sebald! If you asked me for water, well and good. I don't say I would not give you some Sonneberg water. Yes, I should not mind giving you a little, though it is rather strong for an invalid."

"Sonneberg water!" stammered Sebald.

"Yes, perhaps you never tasted it; it's a water—very good water for the eyes, and all other bodily infirmities, Master Sebald; so good that my grandmother Anna, who never missed taking at least two pints a day, was able to read her almanac without spectacles when she was eighty."

And as Master Sebald made her no answer, he was so disgusted with all the water in the world, she took her flask from her pocket, and said—

"I went last night and fetched this little bottle on purpose for you—he, he, he!—here, just taste that!"

The poor tavern-keeper turned his head with a look of despair, but the neck of the bottle had hardly approached his lips, when, quickly raising himself on his elbow, with trembling hands he snatched the flask from the old woman and began to drink, his eyes almost out of his head, in a state of ecstasy impossible to describe—his throat swelled up, and subsided again like that of a nightingale singing his love songs. It was a pleasure to look at him; he finished the last drop with a sigh of regret. The old woman with her

vinous look peeped at him quite tenderly through the curtains.

"Well," said she, taking the empty bottle back and slipping it into her pocket—"well, what do you think of Sonneberg water? Has it done you any good? Can you see better than you did?"

"Yes, yes," said the good man; "it has cleared my eyes and my ideas too. Why, Trievel, it is like the water from the miraculous pool which cured the paralytic—have you got any more of that water?"

"Be quiet and I will get you some."

"Mind, a large bottle, big enough to hold two pints."

"Yes, Master Sebald, yes," said the old woman, laughing heartily.

"And you will put it away behind the bed?"

"Don't be uneasy; but you must not take too much at a time—if anything happened to you I should be lost."

"Oh, nothing will happen to me, Trievel; what good water! You must go and fetch me some of this water every day from—from the Sonneberg isn't it, where it rises?" said he, winking his eye.

"Yes, under the Sonneberg rocks at the foot of the hill."

"Good! good; I thought so; it must come from there. Ah! if I only had another bottle of it I should be cured at once."

"Silence," said Trievel Rasimus, hastily resuming her knitting; "Madame Grédel is coming."

Master Sebald turned his face to the wall again, and pretended to go to sleep, while the old woman took her seat by the window again.

It was not only Grédel, Fridoline, and Christian who

entered the room, but Doctor Eselskopf also, who came to make his daily visit.

"He is asleep," said the old woman.

Eselskopf nodded, laid his cocked hat on the table, placed his cane in the corner, then going up to the bed, he quietly raised the bedclothes and felt the sick man's pulse. They were all looking at him; he seemed very much surprised, and in about a minute he turned round and said—

"What have you been giving to Monsieur Dick?"

"Water and sorrel," replied Madame Grédel.

"Nothing but water and sorrel?"

"Nothing, doctor."

He felt his pulse again, and then considered for a moment.

"It is really extraordinary; I said so before; there is actually too much nourishment in water. This is a fact which deserves to be communicated to the Medical Annals of Hundsrück."

And out he went suddenly, with care on his brow and pinched-up lips, leaving his hat on the table. Christian ran after him.

"Here, Monsieur Eselskopf, you have forgotten your hat and your stick. What is he to have to-day? You have given no instructions."

"Ah, well, you must reduce the spinach by half, and not give him so much water; water is delicious and excellent in itself, but not too much of it."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, I shall call again to-morrow; I must think a little."

Eselskopf departed.

All the spectators were uneasy, especially old Rasi-

mus, who could not help admiring the doctor's penetration.

"He is cleverer than I thought he was," said she to herself.

Nevertheless, as Master Sebald seemed none the worse for it, and Grédel had installed herself in the sick-room, the old woman made it her business to go and fetch some more Sonneberg water, as she had promised Sebald she would.

CHAPTER VI.



TRIEVEL RASIMUS had not left the room a quarter of an hour before Sebald, thanks to the goodness of the water he had been drinking, was in a profound sleep. Until eight in the evening the good fellow dreamed of nothing but vintages, cock-fights, feasts, entertainments, and banquets. Sometimes he was cutting up a magnificent brown pasty, which diffused a delicious smell. Then again he was standing in his waggon returning from the vintage among his great iron-bound casks, and crowned with vine-leaves, holding a tankard full of foaming wine, and singing the glory of his divinity the sun; Father Johannes by his side, like an old faun belonging to the family, was dancing little Fridoline in his arms, while Christian marched behind the waggon with his cap over his ear and his cheeks puffed out, blowing a long bark trumpet. Then he suddenly found himself in the ancient court of the Trabans, among a lot of wicker cages; his cock, the Little Vinedresser, had won a

great battle over the Dutch Admiral of the burgo-master Omacht, and the air was filled with shouts of delight.

Amidst these pleasant dreams indistinct words betrayed Sebald's agitation; Dame Grédel and Fridoline were not free from uneasiness. But towards evening his breathing became calm and regular, and then quiet as a child's.

At last, as the clock of Saint Sylvester struck eight, he awoke, yawned, stretched himself, and at the same moment his eyes met those of old Rasimus, who had already returned, and was sitting knitting at the corner of the window. She made him a signal which conveyed the information that the flask was in the cupboard, which caused him inexpressible satisfaction.

"Grédel!" he began.

"So you are awake at last."

"Yes, I feel quite well again! That Eselskopf is a clever fellow—he has saved my life. You may go quietly to bed now—I do not want you."

He told them this to get rid of Grédel and Fridoline, that he might have the flask in his hands again.

"Wouldn't you like to have something to eat?"

"Yes, I could eat a chitterling, or an omelet, or a——"

"Chitterling!" cried Dame Grédel. "Good Lord! he must be mad! If you have such ideas as these, Sebald, you will never get well."

The good man felt he had committed himself, and trying to laugh it off—

"It was only a joke, Grédel," said he; "God forbid I should want either chitterlings, or black puddings, or anything else of the sort! Nothing but greens, or

sorrel, or spinach for me. But go to bed now. Trievel, tell Grédel to go to bed; it pains me to see her always sitting up with me; and poor little Fridoline, how red her eyes are! Come and kiss me, my child—come and kiss your father, and then go to bed. Am I not right, Trievel?”

“Yes, Monsieur Dick, I have told Dame Grédel a hundred times she would kill herself. She must have proper rest.”

But Grédel unconsciously suspected something wrong.

“Fridoline sat up half last night,” said she; “Trievel shall sit up to-morrow; we will take our turns at sitting up with you.”

“But,” said Sebald, “it worries me to have any one sitting up with me; and the candle keeps me awake.”

“I will put it behind the curtain,” replied Grédel promptly. “Good night, Trievel; good night, Fridoline.”

So, in spite of all, old Rasimus was forced to go. With her usual cunning she saw she would only confirm Grédel in her suspicions had she insisted on remaining. So she got up, yawned, and said—

“Well, good-bye for the present, Master Sebald. I shall not be sorry to have a good night’s rest; I shall sleep enough for to-night and to-morrow too.”

And Fridoline having kissed her father, they left the room together, while Grédel placed the light on the window-ledge and began to knit.

Master Sebald was beside himself with thirst and indignation.

“How annoying it is to have such a good wife!” said he to himself. “She is so fond of me that she would keep me on vegetables and water all my life; did any

one ever know such ill-luck? This is worse than Father Johannes' affection, for he intended to have finished me at once. What shall I do now to get hold of the flask? If I move, if I stretch my arm out, she will look at me, she will see it, and then she will make a disturbance and drive old Rasimus away, while I shall be left all alone with my good wife on one side of me and Eselskopf on the other."

These ideas passed through his brain one after the other; he heard the knitting-needles at work without ceasing, he could see Grédel's profile delineated on the curtain, he listened to the ticking of the clock for awhile, and his impatience became every moment greater.

"In the name of Heaven, Grédel!" said he, after an hour had passed thus, "I beg you will go to bed. It makes my heart ache to see you sitting up like that. You have grown thin—you are not the same woman—you will end by being ill."

He spoke so naturally and so affectionately that Grédel was affected by it.

"Don't think about me, Sebald," said she; "try and go to sleep."

"You cannot think, Grédel, how pleased I should be if you would go to bed. I feel quite well again; but I cannot endure seeing you there, my poor wife; it upsets me, and I keep saying to myself, 'How good Grédel is—she is wearing herself out for my sake.' In Heaven's name go to bed. Listen; it is striking eleven; if you will go to bed I shall soon go to sleep."

Grédel, who was really worn out, at last gave up the point. She laid down her work, and stretched herself on the sofa opposite the alcove, saying—

"I will try and sleep a little, Sebald, just to please you. Should you be in want of anything——"

"I will call you—I will cry out soon enough."

"You need not cry; only say 'Grédel,' and I shall be with you."

The good woman having extinguished the light, Sebald waited patiently a long quarter of an hour, then he gently, very gently, got possession of the flask, and drank till he was satisfied. After which, pleased with his triumph, and smiling to himself, he began to snore like an alderman.

It was broad daylight when good Dame Grédel was awakened by unaccustomed sounds. She listened, thinking that Kasper, the tavern-waiter, was singing as he washed his cans and his glasses, which he did every morning about six, but what was her surprise to hear Master Sebald himself singing Karl Ritter's air—

"Ah! 'tis pleasant beneath the vinés!

Trela, lala, lala, lala."

"Gracious Heaven!" cried she, "Sebald is gone mad!"

But he very quietly made answer—

"No, Grédel, not by any means; I may have been when I sent for Eselskopf, but at this momeat I am in full possession of my faculties. Trela, lala!"

In spite of this assurance to the contrary, Grédel slipped on her dress in a hurry, muttering as she did so—

"Eselskopf—at once we must send for Eselskopf."

Just as she opened the door old Rasimus, who was coming to relieve her, appeared at the end of the gallery.

"The Lord Himself has sent you, Trievel!" cried the poor woman.

"Why? what has happened?" asked the old woman, not very much alarmed, as she knew how timid Grédel was.

Sebald, lying in bed, heard all this, and called out—

"Why, Trievel, it happens my wife has lost her head. Grédel, are you not ashamed of frightening people? Go—I thought you had more sense."

Rasimus came in, her hands hidden under her shawl, the yellow trimmings to her cap hanging down over her eyebrows; she looked at Sebald, and smiled.

"The good man is doing wonderfully well," she began. "What have you been talking about, Dame Grédel? He has not looked so fresh and well for a long time. Come hither, Fridoline, come and look at him. The poor dear man looks twenty years younger since yesterday."

Fridoline came running in with her white petticoat, then Christian, who had just arrived to hear how Sebald was, then Kasper the waiter, and Soffayel the cook; and Sebald, with the colour come back into his cheeks, smiled at every one like a great baby just awake, and staring about him in his cradle.

"Ha! ha!" said he at last, "no more vegetables for me. Hum! hum! I am doing well, wonderfully well."

Then, looking at Mother Rasimus, he looked rather disconcerted; he held out his hand to her without speaking.

"Do you want to feel my pulse?" asked the old woman, laughing.

"No, Trievel, no; thank God you want no one to feel your pulse to find you have a good heart. I only want to give you a kiss, Trievel; come here and let me kiss you."

And the old woman, affected in her turn, replied—

“I ask nothing better if it can give you any pleasure, Monsieur Dick; you are a fine man—there is nothing to be ashamed of.”

And he embraced her.

Grédel looked stupefied with astonishment.

Then the tavern-keeper, recovering himself a little, said—

“Grédel, and you, Fridoline, look at that good old Trievel Rasimus; look at her well, for she has saved my life. You remember how weak, pale, and miserable I looked yesterday. I had not a drop of blood in my veins; it was that rascal Eselskopf who had put me in such a state. Well, I have reflected a great deal since yesterday, I have thought about many things; the blows of Father Johannes’ cudgel were nothing; what did I want? A poultice on the back, a plain poultice, and at the end of three or four days there would have been nothing to see but a few yellow and green marks, just as when one gets a blow on the face. Instead of that, the beggarly doctor wanted to dry up my body, that he might say to every one in Bergzabern, ‘Look at that thin, tall, yellow-looking man who coughs as he walks along, who has neither arms, nor calves to his legs, and only resembles a broomstick—that is Frantz Christian Sebald Dick; you know who I mean—fat Sebald, that is he; well, I saved his life; had it not been for me and fresh water he would have been a dead man—let that be a warning to you.’ And they would have been frightened, and every one would have taken to water-drinking, and Eselskopf would have written a great book about me and his vegetable and water treatment; he would have been proud of it, and would have

been sent for to Munich, and Vienna, and Berlin to cure all the fat people there. Ah ! I have often thought all about this—yes, that is the state of the case. The vagabond ! I wish he was here. Fortunately his plot has miscarried, and I owe it to her, to Triebel herself, that I am alive now. I owe her my happiness, my health, and my life. Look here !”

He took an enormous flask out of the cupboard, and holding it up with an air of adoration—

“It is with that she cured me ! Oh, Rasimus ! Rasimus ! never shall I forget that I owe it to you that I can now see the light of day ! I am not angry with you, Grédel, but God has given you no brains ; Eselskopf had made you believe that vegetables and water would save my life. You believed him, and I cannot blame you ; but only let him come here again—let him come, and I shall have a few minutes’ private conversation with him !”

The good man paused for want of breath ; then looking at Fridoline, who was shedding tears of joy at the end of the bed, he beckoned to her to come to him, and held her a long time against his heart in silence. Christian was not the most unmoved spectator of this scene ; Master Sebald saw him standing pale and motionless against the window.

“Come hither, boy,” said he ; “come a little nearer. You were not one of those who forsook me either. You have been here every day to hear how I was getting on. Don’t be uneasy—don’t be uneasy. Sebald Dick is not ungrateful. I have something for you which will please you.”

He looked at Fridoline, who was still leaning on his shoulder, and Christian began to tremble so that for a

few seconds he could not find a word to say. At last he began—

“You know, Master Sebald, I loved you and your family for a very long time.”

“Yes, I know that very well, and we will talk about it again by-and-by.”

Then, turning to old Rasimus—

“Trievel,” said he, laughing, “do not think I pay people with fine words only. You must understand there is a place at my table for you every day as long as we either of us live. By God’s grace you shall have no other care than that of your glass and knife and fork. Should I unfortunately die before you, Grédel and Fridoline will be here still to keep my promise to you.”

“That,” said the delighted old woman, “is too good to refuse, Master Sebald; on the contrary, I should say what I did not mean if I thought of refusing such an offer.”

“Yes, but that is not all, Trievel; I must make you a present in the place of this excellent flask, which I intend to keep as a souvenir. I have made up my mind about that since last night. You must ask me for something, I don’t care what. See now, tell me what you would like. If you asked for my vineyard at Kilian, or even the Fromuhle mill, you should have it, for you are a good woman, and no fool as most are.”

Old Rasimus became very grave as he said this; she coloured up, and her long nose, her cheeks, and her temples became scarlet; she had never been in such a dilemma in her life. But it soon wore off, and drawing her pasteboard snuff-box from the depths of her pocket, she closed her left eye, and slowly took a pinch, and

looked round at every one who was waiting for her to speak, saying to herself—

“Now Triebel is become rich she will be the best match in Bergzabern after Mademoiselle Fridoline.”

She looked and saw all their attentive faces, and ended by replying—

“Since I must form a wish—well, we will see what it will be some other time. I don’t know much about it, and the same thing might happen to me as to the old woman and the three puddings. First she wished for a pudding, and it came; then, being in a rage, she wished it on her husband’s nose; then she was obliged to spend her last wish in getting it off again. I must think it over. If it were of any use to wish myself thirty years younger, with a handsome young husband, I should do so at once, but at my time of life I must think about it.”


“Think about it, then,” said Sebald, laughing. “And now, Christian, you must go to Purrhus, the watchman, and tell him to cry all through the town, at the corner of every street, that Frantz Christian Sebald Dick is recovered, and that he invites all his friends and acquaintances to a grand banquet next Sunday week in order to celebrate his restoration to health, and to return thanks to the Lord. Tell him to stop under Eselskopf’s windows, and to blow his horn till he shows himself, that he may see all his tricks have ended in nothing—that I laugh at him, and intend to drink wine—old wine—the best Rudesheimer I have, to make up for lost time. Go, Christian, and be back again soon, for Grédel must prepare us a nice fry to celebrate my recovery. I fancy I hear the butter in the frying-pan already—ha, ha, ha!”

"Sebald," said Grédel reproachfully, "be careful; you must not begin all at once."

"Never fear, wife, I know how to take care of myself. I don't want to begin drinking water again; besides, old Rasimus is here to put me in mind of it. Now then, clear out and let me get up."

So every one went away, talking about what had happened, Sebald's generosity, and Trievel's good luck, who found herself raised to the pinnacle of glory, having only to utter a wish to become rich. They were never tired of talking about these things, and the news soon spread all through the court of the Trabans.

CHAPTER VII.

RIEVEL RASIMUS dwelt in a little cottage, about fifty yards to the left of the Mayence Ham. This cottage was roofed with rotten old planks, a few tiles here and there, and an iron gutter, through which the rain poured like a cullender; it had two very small windows, with dirty little panes set in lead.

When the weather was fine, the old stocking-darner used to hang all her rags out against the ruined walls: her old jackets, patched petticoats, bonnets, stockings, and slippers.

At the door-jamb she used also to hang her black-bird Jacob, in his wicker cage, a splendid bird, with a bright orange-coloured beak, and eyes shining like pearls of agate, and who could sing all the first part of "I have very good tobacco, and what do I want for

more?" These five or six notes, whistled so shrilly, awoke all the echoes in the court, and seemed to harmonise with the tic-tac of Toubac's hammer, the whizzing of Paulus's grindstone, the drawling notes of Karl Beutz as he plaited his baskets, and the numberless noises in the old sewer.

Jacob was incontestably the leader of the orchestra, consisting of the crickets, humble-bees, cobblers, basket-makers, knife-grinders, tinder-sellers, chattering old gossips, and screaming children of the whole neighbourhood. He was the familiar deity of the spot, the first voice of spring, and the last sigh of autumn. When Jacob ceased to sing everything was still; the little windows were blocked up with snow, nothing but mud out of doors, and indoors the inhabitants sat by the fire and shivered. When he began to whistle his favourite air again, you need only open the door to see the sun again, the beautiful sun glancing from the roofs down into the dirty court, and seeming to smile and say, "Here I am again; look at the hills; the violets have begun to blow, and the snow of last year is melting along the sides of the Bocksberg."

It was, therefore, impossible to describe how fond old Rasimus was of her blackbird; she fed him with white cheese, and cleaned his cage out every morning. Nothing could be more simple than the interior of her cottage; her pallet bed in one corner, her clothes-press on the right; above it the Holy Virgin dressed in faded silk, and crowned with yellow macaroni; on the left the blackbird dozing in his cage; one or two rabbits nibbling something in the dark, or running about under the bed; lastly, some rags hanging on nails against the wall. In this cottage Triebel had lived for five-and-

thirty or forty years. She would not have exchanged her hovel for an empire, and I do not think she was much to blame, for what is it which gives things a value but the souvenirs we attach to them? Now Trievel's hovel recalled many a pleasant hour; she had not always a red nose, the excellent woman, and the blackbird had not always been the only singer in the house. Poor Trievel, she had only to creep through her low door, and all the songs of her youth came back to her memory, and without intending it she would hum snatches and fragments of them, sometimes melancholy ones, but more often lively, particularly if she just came in from the tavern.

One can well believe that day Trievel was not in a melancholy humour, but quite the contrary; she laughed and wriggled about as she crossed the court, and some of the wits of the neighbourhood, pretending to be ignorant of what had just occurred, asked her as she went by—

“Ha! Mother Rasimus, how are you this morning? Won't you take a pinch?”

They held their snuff-boxes out of window to her, meaning to get on good terms with her; but Trievel winked her eye, and replied—

“Thanks, Fritz; thanks, Yokel—another time—you are very polite—very polite indeed—but they are waiting breakfast for me, and I must dress myself.” And as she picked her way along the broken pavement to her old hut, “Good heavens!” said she, “how many friends make their appearance when one is no longer in want of them!”

The frightened rabbits then disappeared in their hutch, and the blackbird began to sing. She was too

much preoccupied to pay attention to these things, but began to choose the best of her ancient finery ; a tulle cap, with ribbons as wide as your hand, an orange dress with green flounces, blue stockings, a pair of nearly new shoes, and a long black and red shawl.

"Now, Trievel," said she aloud, "you need not hesitate ; you may dress yourself as fine as the burgomaster's wife. Thank God, you are as good-looking as Catherine Omacht, and that is no compliment. You must make the best of yourself, Trievel, to do credit to Master Sebald's table ; you must pull out your moustaches with the tweezers as Mademoiselle Koenig, the beadle's daughter, does ; young women who are on their preferment cannot have moustaches."

She deposited her apparel on the old commode, and then remembering what she had been thinking about—

"Ha ! ha ! what makes you so uneasy, Trievel ?" she began, laughing ; "are you going crazy at your time of life ? Thank Heaven those foolish times are over !"

And the poor old thing sighed.

At that moment there came two knocks at the door.

"Wait," she called out—"wait a moment ; I am putting my dress on."

"It is I, Trievel ; it is Toubac," said the tinker.

"Wait a moment till I am ready."

And then she said to herself—

"Ah ! the rascal, he is going to make me a declaration now. We shall see—we shall see."

Then slipping on her skirt—

"You may come in, Toubac—come in."

Toubac walked in, his grey eyes rather clouded, his cheeks red, and his nostrils dilated, looking very grave, like a poodle performing his lesson. He wore his

Sunday hat, a white shirt, the collars of which were cutting his ears, his best brown jacket with bright brass buttons, and his blue cloth pantaloons, which he only wore on fête days when he went to church.

"Good day, Trievel," said he, lowering his voice, generally rather disguised with kirschwasser and tobacco—"good ay, Trievel. Good Lord, how handsome you are! It quite dazzles me to look at you. Why, Trievel, you grow younger every day—you are like a wild rosebush; when there are no flowers on it in the evening there grow plenty next morning."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the old woman, "is it possible, Toubac? You cannot mean what you say."

"Trievel, can you believe at my age I——"

"Toubac, you are a deceiver!"

"I, Trievel? Oh, if I were capable——"

"Yes, you may try, Toubac, with your fine words——"

"But—but—Trievel, when I tell you—there, upon my honour—it is nothing but the truth. Your good looks fetch my eyes out of my head. I have been looking at you for the last five-and-twenty years, and every day you grow younger and better-looking."

"See now, how strange; you think I am growing younger?"

"Yes; I should have proposed to you a hundred times but I was afraid of being refused; it would have been a death-blow to me."

"Toubac! what impossible nonsense!"

"True, indeed, I should have wasted away to nothing. But how can I help it? I am as timid as a child; if I have not had a drop or so I dare not say what I have most at heart, just as it happened at the

great entertainment a fortnight ago, do you recollect, Trievel?"

"Yes, but you have not mentioned the subject since."

"That is it, I did not dare! But I am more in love with you than ever; look, Trievel, how I tremble."

The old woman had her back turned towards him as she was putting her cap on before the glass, and she laughed quietly. Toubac heard her laugh, and said—

"You are laughing at me, Trievel, but it is true for all that: you make me miserable. I dream of you day and night."

"I am laughing, Toubac, because since this morning every one adores me; some offer me a pinch of snuff, others tell me I resemble a rosebush, and I am growing younger daily; all that, of course, gives me pleasure. I readily believe you love me, Toubac; I am not too old a Rasimus that some one should not love me; there are some who have still more wrinkles on their nose than I have, and who are adored all the same. Besides, you have already told me so two or three times, which shows your good sense. But, honestly now, Toubac, there must be some other reason which makes you come and propose to me to-day rather than last week, and when you are quite sober too, as you have already remarked, there must be some other reason."

Then she turned round and began to laugh.

"Come, tell me now, am I not right?"

Toubac made an attempt to deny it.

"Have you not heard that Master Sebald wants me to form a wish of some sort—to ask something of him?"

The tinker did not know which way to turn.

"I have heard them talking about it," said he, scratching his ear; "but I shall never believe that Master Sebald——"

"That is just where you make a mistake," interrupted the old woman, forcing a smile, and nodding her head with a self-satisfied air.

Then she took a turn about the room, twisting herself about, drawing her shawl closer on her back, and looking at herself over her shoulder, to see if her dress swept the ground properly.

"That is where you are quite mistaken, Monsieur Toubac—that is exactly what he did say to me; I need only express a wish—a house, a vine, a large sum of money—and he would give it me."

"Is it possible?" said the tinker ingenuously. "And what are you going to wish for, Trievel? What do you intend to ask for?"

Then the old woman ceased her airs, and recovered her usual stupid manner, then she took a pinch of snuff without any farther affectation, and answered thoughtfully—

"As to that, we shall see. You understand it requires consideration. I shall make up my mind the day of the grand banquet, and according as I shall feel inclined to marry a burgomaster, a councillor, or a tinker, shall I express my wish. But I must first choose a husband—thank God there is no want of them now—and then I shall choose my fortune. But for a moment I shall neither say yes nor no, Toubac. Since you think me a pretty woman, I must say I think you a handsome man; but if others should offer themselves, then I shall look about; I can afford to be difficult in my choice now, and shall please my fancy."

"Trievel," cried the tinker, making believe to tear his hair, "if you choose another I will hang myself at your door."

"Nonsense, Toubac," said the woman, "go and get your breakfast; or, stay, come with me, that is better than despairing; give me your arm, and let us be off."

Toubac gallantly offered his arm, and they walked away together very seriously. Every one in the court was looking out of window, and said—

"Toubac has made a conquest of Trievel; what an old fool she must be to think he is running after her for her beauty! See how she holds her head up, look at the airs she is giving herself—ha! ha!"

The old woman, overhearing these remarks, half closed her eyes and pursed up her lips to make them the more angry; and in this style they reached the door of the Mayence Ham. Master Sebald, who was sitting at table, no sooner saw them than he clapped his hands above his head, and cried out—

"Trievel! Trievel! I am glad to see you, you always do me good! Come here, this is your place, and, Toubac, there is yours."

And as Trievel, without a smile on her face, saluted them all with a curtsy worthy of a lady-in-waiting, the jolly old tavern-keeper burst into a laugh so joyous that the echoes of the old tavern, which had so long been mute, awoke in their turn, and carried the sound down to the kitchen.

CHAPTER VIII.



THAT day was a great treat for all the bonvivants of the Trabans' Court, and all Bergzabern besides. You could hear the drum of Purrhus, the watchman, a long way off, and his shrill voice cry out—

“This is to give notice that by the grace of God and the intercession of the Holy Virgin, Master Frantz Christian Sebaldus Dick has been happily restored to health, that he is very well, and invites all his friends and acquaintances to meet next Sunday week, after high mass, to celebrate the praises of the Lord, with their glasses in their hands. There will be a banquet in the yard of the old synagogue, the music of three bands, ninepins, the game of the ring, the barrel, &c.”

The sun himself seemed to share in the general gaiety, for he shone with more than usual splendour. One could see from the upper windows of the tavern the purple of autumn spreading along the hill-side, the vines as far as the eye could reach loaded with grapes, and the oak forest of Schlosswald above them, whose green foliage had begun to turn brown.

In the court everything rustled and buzzed in the damp warmth concentrated between the gloomy old buildings. Anna Schmidt's yellow cock flapped his wings and screamed hoarsely among his hens; the blackbird of old Rasimus sang like a cuckoo the same four notes. Millions of small golden flies flitted about in the red light which descended from the tiles. And at the darker end of the court sat Master Sebald, old Rasimus, Christian, Fridoline, Toubac, Grédel, and

twenty more, eating, drinking, and congratulating one another, and shaking hands with others who by threes, fours, and sixes at a time, hurried in under the archway of the Trabans, waving their caps and calling out—

“Good health to you, Master Sebald! we are glad to see you again looking so well! How you have frightened us! That rascal Eselskopf had reduced you indeed. Well, you are here again at last, thank Heaven! Do you know, Master Sebald, one ought to be as strong as you are to have got over it.”

“I believe so, truly!” cried the good fellow; “fifty others would have died under such treatment. I had to live for a fortnight on my own fat; fortunately there was enough to keep me alive. But if I meet Eselskopf let him look out, that’s all.”

He shook his fist significantly, and they all agreed with him. But the poor man, whose old brown coat fitted him now like a dressing-gown, when he noticed how the sleeves hung about his shrunken arms, and the collar fell in folds about his neck and shoulders like the hood of Father Johannes, seemed rather out of spirits.

“You might put four such men as I am now into it,” said he; “but patience, Grédel, wait a bit! I will undertake to fill it out again entirely; in a fortnight or three weeks’ time there shall not be a single wrinkle in it. Fill my glass, Christian, don’t you see it is empty? Trievel, pass me the black puddings. Good gracious! how glad I am to find myself sitting here again at table without seeing Eselskopf’s long yellow physiognomy, who called out at every mouthful, ‘Stop, stop, too much, take care, you are eating too much spinach!’ Ought not such a rascal as that to be hanged? I have

always said there is no justice on this earth, for if there was Eselskopf would have been shaking in the wind long ago from the gallows in the Galzenberg."

The whole day passed in this pleasant way. About six in the evening old Rosselkasten, at the head of the band from the Three Herrings, came and played a serenade at the door of the Mayence Ham. There were three clarionets, two trombones, a fifer, and Rosselkasten himself, who was double-bass. They played a grand symphony about the rising of the sun; Master Sebald, in a state of delighted meditation, listening to it till tears began to roll down his cheeks, and he called out—

"Good Lord! when I think how near I was dying!"

At these affecting words all present shivered; Grédel grew pale, and Fridoline went and threw herself into her father's arms, who sobbed like a child.

Then Rosselkasten and the whole band were brought to drink to the tavern-keeper's happy recovery.

They retired, however, earlier than usual, for Master Sebald, feeling tired, went to bed early. Grédel, Mother Rasimus, Fridoline, and Christian, after sitting up so often and so much uneasiness, were also in want of rest.

What most delighted these good people was to hear that at nightfall, after he had been round the town, Purrhus came to tell them that Eselskopf had gone on board Baptiste Kromer's boat, under pretence of going to visit his aunt at Creuznach. They all comprehended he had made his escape to conceal his shame at having been defeated.

Master Sebald had one glass more in honour of this additional triumph; after which, with unsteady legs, supported on one side by Christian, and on the other

by Toubac, he retired to his room. At the same time his friends left the parlour, and for a long time afterwards people used to talk about these extraordinary occurrences, and of Master Sebald Dick's singular good luck at various critical moments of his life, how he was always under the protection of some invisible power.

There was great talk, too, about the good fortune of Trievel Rasimus, of the tender glances exchanged between Fridoline and Christian, and many other topics of the same sort.

It was such a fine night, so calm and sweet, and the sky so studded with stars, that one could hardly make up one's mind to go home.

At last there was an end to all this conversation, and even to whispering. By eleven all Bergzabern was asleep, waiting for the promised banquet, and for what the future was to bring forth, upon which at present no two persons seemed to agree.

CHAPTER IX.



THE Book of Ecclesiastes says in its wisdom all is vanity; love, wealth, health, gratified ambition, the humiliation of our enemies, and our own glory do not constitute happiness. We are never satisfied either with ourselves or others, and things go on thus from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year, until at last, lean, yellow, bald, broken in health, crippled, with dimmed eyes, deaf ears, toothless jaws, and fallen chins, we finish by exclaiming in a tremulous voice, "Vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas!"

Alas! the king, prophet, philosopher, old rabbi, whoever he may be, who formerly (about three thousand years ago) wrote these things, was a man well acquainted with men and human life; he had seen, touched, felt, observed, and reasoned upon them; he was right, very right, but these truths offer us no consolation, and under correction he would have done better had he remained silent than thus have struck our souls with dismay.

Anyhow, the old rabbi was right. What did Master Sebald want now to be perfectly happy? Had he not recovered his health, his appetite, and his good looks? Was he not delivered from the clutches of Eselskopf? Did he not see Grédel, Fridoline, Christian, and Trievel Rasimus around him, the people he liked better than any others? Was not the vintage approaching, and the day of the grand banquet, fixed by himself, to celebrate his happy convalescence?—was it not the very next Sunday but one?

No doubt he ought to have been contented; nevertheless, Trievel Rasimus the next day noticed he was not the same man; he did not drink his wine with his former gusto, nor did he laugh as joyously as before, and every moment he turned his eyes to the door as if in expectation of something.

The old stocking-darner noticed this peculiar restlessness in him the next morning from her window. At day-break he left his room, opened the tavern, and with his hands crossed behind his back, kept his eyes fixed on the Trabans' Gate. Ennui was painted on his good-natured face; he went in and out again, then in a melancholy mood sat down to his breakfast with a vacant and absent look. His fork fell several times from his hands,

and his glass stopped half-way between the table and his lips. Sometimes he set it down untasted. Even the appearance of Fridoline failed to make him smile.

“Sit down, my child, and let us talk.”

But Fridoline could think of nothing to say to him.

Sometimes he would exclaim, “Ah! the good old times are gone never to return.”

Then old Mother Rasimus, who had gone away to attire herself, would run in and say—

“Good day, Monsieur Dick. Well, how is the appetite this morning?”

“So so; sit down, Trievel; eat and drink; these chitterlings are excellent, but I am not hungry. I have something wrong inside.”

Then he would put his finger against his heart.

“There, just there,” he would say pathetically; “there is something out of order there; I feel it—a sort of oppression.”

Then he began exclaiming against Father Johannes—

“The vagabond! he will be my death. He struck the blow which made me waste away—the bandit!—and I loved him so. I would have given him anything—the half of all I am worth. I looked on him as my own brother.”

Then his voice became thicker; he grew pale.

“I see surely enough,” said he, “that it is all over with me.”

Then he would get up and walk about with his hand on his heart, and his eyes full of tears, exclaiming—

“It is always those one loves the most who strike one the hardest blows. One never ought to care for any one. I could not help it—that beggar, when I saw him my heart rejoiced. I ought to have shut the

door in his face. But who could help it? So it was to be."

On those occasions old Rasimus said nothing. She let his anger run its course, which sometimes lasted half-an-hour; then he sat down and drank his liquor in silence.

Sometimes Toubac, or some one else, arriving in the middle of this fit of anger, would chime in with the good man's abuse of the capuchin; then he used to break in with—

"Why do you interfere? I am the person to complain. Do I want your assistance to say he is a beggar, a rascal, and a bandit? Cannot I say as much myself? Was it I, yes or no, whom he attacked in that cowardly manner from behind? Don't mention him before me; he is not worth talking about. What is the use of coming and teasing me about that man? I know nothing more of him; it is the same to me as if he had never existed."

Nearly every day wood-cutters and charcoal-burners came in as they were passing the Mayence Ham to have a pint or so of wine. Master Sebald, who was acquainted with every one for miles around, would go and lean with both his hands on the table without sitting down, talking about crops, price of wood, &c.

"The rascal! the capuchin!" was always the end of what he had to say.

"Ah, Master Sebald!" they would reply, "it is not every day a feast with him now as it used to be; now his chitterlings are potatoes roasted on the ashes, and his Pleiszeller is only spring water."

"Is he very lean?"

"Is he lean? He is only skin and bone!"

"Why does he not go making collections with his ass Polak?"

"Ah, Monsieur Dick! people are not as charitable as they used to be. The capuchins have no longer the village chimneys to fall back upon. Father Johannes may sing his 'oremus' from morning till night. The raven of the prophet Elijah brings him no puddings; he is wasting away."

"Well, then," said the tavern-keeper, "I am satisfied, since that is the case; the rascal had not courage enough to come and see me, and say, 'Master Sebald, it was through your white wine that I sinned against you.' It would not have cost him much to invent that excuse, and I should have affected to believe him; but, rather than act thus, his pride lets him suffer; he expects me to go and say, 'Father Johannes, come and eat my chitterlings and black puddings, and drink my Pleiszeller!' Yes, it is likely I should go to him and say so—let him wait till I do!"

Then he added—

"I am fortunate to have got rid of such a rascal—how fortunate! I can freely confess now that the day I suffered the blows from his cudgel was the happiest day of my life; at all events, I have got rid of a nuisance."

So the worthy tavern-keeper was pleased with all he heard and all he saw, nevertheless his gloominess increased daily as the day of the banquet drew nigh.

About the middle of the week it was necessary to begin the preparations for the feast, the arrangements of the tables, the construction of an orchestra for the musicians, and the decorations for the court.

Master Sebald was to be seen walking about, rule in

hand, with the carpenters, Furst and Ulrich, taking dimensions, and discussing the proposed arrangements himself, which he had never done before ; consequently one judged the solemnity would be grander and more imposing than all those of the same sort which preceded it.

He went into his cellars, and visited them personally from one end to the other, accompanied by his cellarman, Schweyer, and his men, pointing out what barrels were to be tapped for the first course, and for the second and third also, and choosing what bottled wine ought to be set on table at dessert. He also paid attention to the orders given for eatables ; he wrote letters to all his correspondents at Spire, Mayence, Frankfort, and even at Cologne.

In opposition to Grédel's advice, he insisted upon having sea-fish sent for, and as his wife acknowledged she was quite ignorant of the manner it should be cooked, never having been away from her native place in her life, that nothing might be wanting in that respect, he wrote to the celebrated cook Hafenkouker, at the Ræmar Hotel, at Frankfort, to come and superintend this part of the dinner in person.

All these matters took up much of his attention, and Fridoline, Mother Rasimus, as well as Christian, were consulted. Christian was especially charged with the decorations, which were to be of different foliage ; the oak, beech, plane-tree, and larch contributed their leaves for that purpose.

The great world of Bergzabern relieved one another under the archway of the Trabans in contemplating these grandiose preparations ; garlands which reached to the roofs in gigantic curves, walls covered with moss ;

the wretched stalls were bedecked with flowers and leaves so well, that even their little windows were concealed by them.

From the Thursday of the second week the tables were already prepared—they were in the shape of a horseshoe—the table between the two arms was for Sebald's intimate friends, his family, and those he delighted to honour.

That day, as they were arranging each guest's place, so that friend might sit by friend, the carpenter Furst, pointing to the top of the middle table, said—

“Master Sebald, that is the place of honour—you ought to put our burgomaster Omacht there.”

“The burgomaster!” exclaimed Sebald in a rage—“much I care about the burgomaster! A man who sends to Amsterdam for game-cocks to beat ours. Let him go to the devil, and find a place where he can.”

“But,” objected Furst, “who will you give the place to? You cannot sit in both places at once, Monsieur Dick, that is impossible.”

“That seat shall remain empty,” said the tavern-keeper in a gloomy tone—“yes; it shall remain empty; no one shall sit there.”

Then becoming more animated—

“He for whom it was intended,” said he, “is a rascal, a creature puffed up with pride and vanity, and who, I warn you, will never have the heart to show himself here; a creature who has made himself contemptible in the eyes of every one; his place shall remain empty, and every one shall say, ‘See, that is where the capuchin should have sat, but he confesses himself unworthy of coming and sitting opposite the man who gave him to eat and to drink, and who loved him as a

brother for more than twenty years'—that is my intention, so let no one think I deprive him of his place—I mean nothing of the sort. For should he by any chance return here, you understand me, and see his place taken by another, it might break his heart, and the shame thereof would fall upon me."

Thus spoke the worthy tavern-keeper; and though no one understood his reasons in the least, Furst replied—

"Yes—oh, yes; that makes a difference, of course. I was not aware of these matters previously."

The last day packages arrived from all parts of Germany. The great room was so encumbered with baskets of game, hampers, packages, cases, and bales, that it required five men's labour to put everything in order. The kitchen was taken up with preparing "kuchlen" and "kougelhof," and other pastry which Grédel had already begun to get ready.

Shouts of enthusiasm heralded the arrival of every fresh vehicle. But what astonished the crowd the most was the sight of the sea-fish. Till then Master Sebald had been very uneasy respecting it. The celebrated Hafenkouker came the previous evening with his three principal scullions in white jackets and cottou caps. He had also caused a stove to be erected in one of the corners of the court, as the kitchen was not sufficiently spacious to allow so many succulent dishes to be cooked, nor was the door sufficiently wide to admit of their passage.

The sea-fish arrived on Saturday afternoon, in such profusion that the carriage which brought it could only just pass through the Trabans' gateway; and they began to unpack these unknown fish on the long deal

tables in the middle of the court, some as large and flat as a plate, glutinous, black on one side and white or pink on the other, with large ribbed fins like the wings of a bat—soles, rays, whittings, turbot, all those strange-looking creatures whose heads are hardly to be distinguished from their tails, and with their mouths in the middle of their bellies—creatures entirely unknown in the mountains; Sebald himself did not know their names. You can easily picture to yourself the amazement of the crowd. They stood round the tables looking at them and conjecturing whether they swam upright or on their sides or their bellies. They could hardly believe the Lord had created such hideous objects, and every one made a private resolution not to taste them. Master Sebald himself held his nose, and said—

“They may be very good eating for savages when they have been on short rations for three or four days, and there is nothing left for them but to devour one another or to eat these great bull-heads. I thought they were something quite different, or I should not have sent for them.”

However, they were very well satisfied to find among these monsters four-and-twenty such magnificent lobsters that the finest from Hundsrück were small by comparison.

But Hafenkouker was not of the same opinion as the spectators. He considered the sea-fish very fine, and had them taken to his extemporised kitchen, declaring that Master Sebald would get over his prejudice against them when he saw them properly dressed.

Thus supplies were arriving from all parts. The

tables were arranged, the court decked out with garlands and flags, the ovens alight; but for all that Master Sebald seemed, amidst all his glorification, dull and out of spirits. Instead of laughing and bragging as formerly, he looked at everything with indifference. At supper that evening Mother Rasimus noticed the worthy man's eyes were full of tears.

"My dear children," said he all at once, addressing Fridoline and Christian, who were smiling at one another after having hung up the last remaining garland, "you cannot think how pleased I am with you. You have fulfilled—nay, anticipated—my every wish, and I cannot look at you without pride and satisfaction. Yes; Frantz Sebald Christian Dick is the happiest of men, and to-morrow will be a pleasant day for every one—for you, in the first place, my children; for Trievel Rasimus, who has to express her wish; for all our friends and relations; for us all, except——"

He did not finish what he had to say, but added, after a moment's pause—

"It is my wish that the poor—those who have only potatoes to eat and water to drink—should also share in our gratifications."

And then, with emotion perceptible in his voice, he desired the remains of the banquet should be distributed among them, together with the sum of a hundred gulden.

"Christian and Fridoline shall see to this," said he, "and the Lord will send His blessing upon them."

He said no more, but retired much affected to his chamber.

Trievel comprehended the good man wished to see his old companion Johannes again, and the want of it

spoiled all his pleasure, while he was oppressed with the idea that the father was in distress while he was surrounded by joy and plenty.

But how could it be helped? The capuchin's pride was not less than that of the master of the tavern. Johannes clung fast to the God of Jacob. Sebald would have despised himself had he renounced the divinity of the sun. Try, then, to induce either to make the first advances! It was impossible. Trievel returned to her cottage, turning all this over in her mind.

CHAPTER X.



OW about three on that Sunday morning Trievel Rasimus's windows were all on a sudden lighted up; the old woman got up, slipped on her clothes, and then half opening the door she began to gaze up in the sky all sparkling with stars.

"It is a magnificent sight," thought she—"it will be nice cool walking."

Then she finished dressing herself.

Jacob, the blackbird, was quite astonished to be aroused so long before daybreak, he who had been so long accustomed to awaken other people, so he never stirred from the bottom of his cage; with his glittering eyes he watched the light as it moved about the room. The rabbits, too, kept very still, except the old one, the grandfather of them all, a fine white rabbit with brown spots, which Mother Rasimus called Abraham, on account of his long whiskers, his very numerous progeny,

and his venerable aspect. Abraham sat on the doorstep alternately raising and depressing one ear at a time, and scratching his nose with his paw as much as to say, "What can she be up as early as this for? Is she going out? Perhaps she has some design on the life of my dear Isaac, the hope and consolation of my old age?"

At last Trievel, having put on her thick shoes, took her stick and left the cottage, taking no further precaution than to shut the crazy door and draw the bolt; then she passed under the Trabans' archway and gained the street. The Trabans' street, as one leaves the court, leads on the left to the lower town, as far as the little entrance to the markets and the old shambles. As you go up the street to the right towards the Schlosswald, you come to the hermitage of the Holy Chapel of the Lupersberg. It was in this last direction, nearer to the open country, that Trievel Rasimus turned her steps. She trotted along, holding her head down, with her stick in her hand, and the fringes of her cap flapping against her brickdust-coloured cheeks. She might have been mistaken, by the pale light of the moon, as she hurried along under the shadow of the walls, for an old gipsy marauding, the more so as she never slackened her pace.

At the end of a quarter of an hour she had reached the path which crosses the vines up to the top of the hill. The moon in the open country shone like a mirror, lighting up the low walls of dry stone, the knotty vine-storks and their large red leaves, the brushwood, and even the small pebbles in the path; one could see them plainer than by day. The weather was mild, in the distance a partridge was calling, and

one could hear him flapping his wings and another call to him in reply.

Triewel Rasimus stopped for a moment or two at the foot of the moss-covered cross, at which the pilgrims from the Marienthal kneel; she drew her flask from her pocket and took a good draught, then jerking up her dress in her left hand she began to climb like a goat, only halting now and then on the little terraces to recover her breath.

She was soon looking down on the Trabans' court. From that height the ancient town with its pointed pinnacles, its immense roofs with four or five rows of windows in them, its spires, its spouts to carry off the rain, its labyrinths of narrow streets, its penthouses, its turrets with their sharp outlines cut in black on the snowy white pavement; the church of Saint Sylvester, enriched with sculpture, with its three gloomy porches and its thousand statuettes of male and female saints, silvered by the moon against the dark background of their niches; the tumble-down synagogue, the tavern, and the numerous sheds in the deep court which the pale moonlight could not reach—all this offered a strange, mysterious, and grandiose spectacle. All slept in Bergzabern, only in one corner of the Trabans' court a red light showed that Hafenkouker's stoves were already at work; Hafenkouker himself and his scullions, in cotton nightcaps, flitted from time to time across the light like so many imps, and their long shadows were cast all round the moss-bedecked walls.

"He! he! he!" cried the old woman as she laughed, "the savoury smell comes up as far as this. Good gracious! what a feast we shall have!"

With this comforting reflection Triewel began climb-

ing up the hill again. Brushwood succeeded to vines, then heather; at last, as it struck four, and hundreds of cocks were calling from one farm to another, and the barking of the various town dogs, mingled in confusion with other sounds, reached the place where she was standing, Trievel Rasimus arrived at the barren summit, and saw facing her, on the other slope of the Lupersberg, the tall tower of the little chapel of Saint John and the thatched roof of the hermitage peeping through the morning fog. Not a sound was here to be heard, not a murmur. As the moon was towards Pirmasens, the shadow of the summit of the mountain covered the whole of the slope on that side. A light from within occasionally illuminated the two windows of the hovel, then all was dark again.

"Here we are at last," said Trievel to herself, taking a good pinch of snuff; then she started again. Ten minutes later she was close to the building; and with outstretched neck she leand towards one of the windows to ascertain what was doing inside.

At first she could distinguish nothing, it was so dark; then she made out some upright supports, from which bundles of straw, hay, and various grasses were hanging; then a large box full of dry leaves, and a sack for a pillow; on the left an opening in the wall, a black hole, at the bottom of which something moved. Trievel at first thought it was the capuchin, who had betaken himself to that hole as a sort of expiation; but on looking again she recognised Polak, the ass, whose long ears and melancholy face were visible from time to time when he lifted his head from the manger, and directly afterwards she saw Father Johannes sitting on the ground, his legs apart in front of the hearth; he

was roasting potatoes in the ashes, and when the fire brightened up all these bundles of hay and straw hanging from the roof, the bars of the manger, the grotesque head of the donkey, his pack-saddle and halter hanging from the wall, the old oaken crucifix and the little earthenware fount of holy water above the bed of leaves, a jug of water in one corner, and the formidable blackthorn cudgel in another—all these things in confusion together seemed to dance with their shadows on the clay walls as the fire flared up; it was truly a strange spectacle.

Father Johannes himself, his elbow on his knee, his cheek on his hand, looked just like the goat Hazazel, condemned to bear the sins of the human race; he had become as yellow, dry, and lean as a piece of old box-wood; his eyebrows, joined like a V above his nose, seemed to have grown closer than ever, and his eyes squinted as he looked at the potatoes. Trievel, knowing how touchy and irritable the capuchin was, after making these observations, crept quietly away through the heather, then making a noise, she walked up to the door as if she had only just arrived.

“Hola! Father Johannes, are you at home? Open the door; it is I, Trievel Rasimus,” cried she, in a tone of good-humour.

“What! Trievel Rasimus! and where do you come from so early, Trievel?”

“From Hirschland, Father Johannes, and I would not pass so close to your hermitage without wishing you good morning.”

“Quite right, Trievel, you did well; come in, come in.”

They crept in under the bundles of hay and straw; both seemed pleased.

"Sit down, Trievel," said the capuchin, giving the old woman the only stool there was in the hut; "warm yourself; it is rather chilly this morning. So you have been to Hirschland?"

"Yes, I have been to invite my cousin Frantz Piper, the clarionet-player, to the great banquet to-day, and I left Hirschland early to get home before it became very hot."

Father Johannes pricked his ears when he heard her talk about a banquet, but he made no observation.

"Indeed," said he—"indeed!"

Trievel had seated herself close to the hearth, and pushed her hair back under her cap; then taking a look round—

"You are not very uncomfortable here, Father Johannes," said she; "especially in winter time, you must be warm enough with your donkey. That bed of leaves—how I like a bed of leaves! they don't get dirty like sheets; they only want turning over a little—well, I think you are very comfortable here."

"Why, yes, one might be worse off," replied the capuchin abstractedly.

Then he returned to the charge.

"So you are returning from Hirschland to be present at a fête. May I ask, Trievel, what saint's day it may be?"

"What, have you not heard?" said the old woman, with an innocent air; "don't you know that Master Sebald gives an entertainment, a grand banquet, something quite out of the common, to-day, something so unusually grand that people talk of nothing else as far as Landau, Neustadt—all round the country, in fact?"

For a moment Father Johannes seemed stupefied.

"You surprise me," said he; "so he is going to give a grand entertainment?"

And there he sat looking straight before him with dilated nostrils, as if he saw this sight, then rousing himself—

"Master Sebald is quite recovered, then?" asked he; "quite recovered, is he? Ah, well, well, so much the better, I am glad to hear it! But for all that, I regret—yes, I regret that a man of his years, a man of experience, hardly snatched from the jaws of death, should think of plunging once more into a sea of sensual delight, of gorging himself with rich viands, and of quenching his thirst with delicious wines; it is—yes, it is most deplorable."

While he was talking about succulent dishes and delicious wines, Johannes seemed to have his mouth full; his nose moved about, and a slight tinge of purple spread over his brown cheeks. Trievel was watching him narrowly.

"You are quite right," returned she; "it makes one shudder to think of it; but it cannot be helped; as soon as the danger is over one thinks of something else. Only fancy, Father Johannes, he has had sent from Mayence three eel-pies—you know what I mean—so tender, with little 'knapfe' and small white mushrooms in them—those pies which——"

"Don't talk to me about eel-pies," interrupted the capuchin, getting up; "don't talk to me about such things. It is revolting, it is abominable, to think that Sebald, instead of working out his salvation after passing through such a terrible ordeal, should only be thinking of cramming his belly with delicate food."

But as he noticed the old woman was watching him from the corner of her eye—

“O Lord!” he continued in a paternal tone, clasping his hands together, “I thank Thee for having cast Thy Divine light upon me; I thank Thee for stopping me when on the brink of that bottomless abyss of sensuality, and for teaching me that all human things are but vanity of vanities. It is not for me, unworthy as I am, to blame my neighbour’s conduct, but I may be permitted to shed tears of regret over his backsliding.”

Then the old sinner passed his hand over his face and turned up his nose, and old Mother Rasimus said in a tone of stupid pity—

“Very fine, Father Johannes—what you have just said is very fine; I always thought you would end by becoming a saint; even when you used to empty the great tankard of Gleiszeller of the year XI., you used to raise your eyes to the ceiling with such an air of adoration that it made me think ‘What a grand saint he would make—what a grand saint, in a picture in the cathedral!’”

Father Johannes looked askance at the old woman, thinking she was laughing at him. She had such an air of conviction, of being quite in earnest, and looked so stupid with her clasped hands on her knees, and the fringe of her cap hanging over her red nose, that he had no doubt she spoke quite seriously.

“Yes,” she continued, “you are quite right, Father Johannes; all these hams, chitterlings, ‘professor’s wurst,’ eel-pies, stuffed turkeys, bottles of Forstheimer and Bodenheimer—all that is but vanity—nothing is certain, very certain, but eternal life, where angels, saints,

and seraphim fly about in the air blowing trumpets as one sees in the chapel of Saint Sylvester ; there, that is certain, it is clear. And I have the idea of being converted a hundred times, but the flesh is so weak, Father Johannes ; why, the smell alone of the kitchen upsets all my good resolutions."

The capuchin said nothing, then he coughed.

"Hum, hum," he observed ; "yes—yes—the flesh !"

Then he paused, so Triebel continued, after treating herself to a pinch of snuff—

"The flesh is the destruction both of men and women ; so, for instance, you would not believe how all the burghers in Bergzabern come and greet Master Sebald, only to be invited to his entertainment—it is a procession from morning till night. And, to tell the truth, all you have seen is but a trifle in comparison with this feast. There are all sorts of game from the mountains, thrushes from the Hundsrück, woodcocks, hazel hens, and blackcock from the Vosges, three wild boars to be stuffed with chestnuts, three roe-deer to be stuffed with olives ; he has sent for fish from the Rhine ; carp, salmon, and trout in abundance, and such extraordinary sea-fish that Koenig, the sexton, Councillor Baltzer, and all who know anything about them, say they will delight you, body and soul. Fruit has been fetched from Hoheim, Vaudenheim, Baden, and elsewhere, in little baskets lined with moss ; the ripest of pears, golden pippins, &c. ; it makes one's mouth water. And for the first time in his life Master Sebald has agreed to send French wine—that is to say, Burgundy, Bordeaux, and red and white Champagne—round at the second course, a thing he never would do hitherto, on account of his great affection for the

German fatherland; but this time it is his wish that all the delicacies of earth, sea, and air should meet on his table, and that it should be remembered by men for ever and ever."

"For ever and ever!" said the capuchin, shrugging his shoulders; "just see there his pride and his foolish vanity. Let me ask you, for ever and ever? and even if it could be so, what glory would there be in passing for a gormandiser down to the hundredth generation? Oh, shame—oh, matter-of-fact creature! Well, well," said he, stammering, striding up and down the hovel, "what is to be done? what to be said? It is a shame and disgrace to Bergzabern as well as the whole course of the Rhine! There was a time when people thought of Divine matters; now their only care is to convey things pleasant to the taste down their throats; in this wise civilisation perishes, for this cause was the world flooded by a deluge, and Sodom and Gomorrah swallowed up in a sea of flames! And I could pity this man! I repented, I almost regretted having chastised him, my heart ached when I thought——"

"Then," said Trievel, interrupting him abruptly, "you don't intend coming to this feast?"

"I go to that banquet!—I? it would be the acme of disgrace, it would be denying my God, my faith, my convictions. God forbid!"

He walked, and talked, and gesticulated; Trievel's eyes followed him, turning her head about like a weathercock, sometimes right, sometimes left.

"Nevertheless, Father Johannes," said she, "your place is there; Master Sebald has kept your place for you."

At these words the capuchin stopped short, and looking at the old woman with a piercing eye—

“How? Master Sebald has kept my place?” cried he. “Then he no longer bears me any ill-will? he confesses he was in the wrong? seeks to be reconciled to me? There always was some good in him, I must allow it; his accursed pride is his destruction, but except that he has an excellent heart. And so he has kept my place for me? You see, Trievel, I could not return to the tavern after the affront I received—no, no! But I confess, when I reflected how I had lost the affection of all my old comrades—Toubac, Hans Aden, Paul Borbès, yours, and Dame Grédel’s—an excellent, a worthy woman, the best cook in the Rheingau, who is no braggart, and is not eternally singing her own praises, right or wrong—when I thought I had lost her affection as well as Christian’s, and above all that of little Fridoline, that dear little child I have carried in my arms and nursed in my bosom, poor little thing!—yes, I confess it was painful not to see all these people any more; it was hard, very hard, and gave me a thousand times more pain than all the rest. Well, it is a great relief to me to know there is no longer any ill-will between us; but return to the Mayence Ham and bow my head before Master Sebald? Never—never!”

Trievel Rasimus listened more attentively to this fine discourse.

“Never!” the capuchin went on; “rather die in distress! If Master Sebald would only make the first advances, if he would confess he was to blame, if he sent some one with a formal invitation——”

He stopped, looking at the old woman, and thinking she was going to say, “That is what brought me here, Father Johannes.” But he was greatly deceived when Trievel began—

"Confess he was in the wrong! Nonsense! Why you don't know him yet."

"But since he has kept a place for me?"

"Of course he has, to defy you."

"How?—to defy me?"

"Yes, to defy you. Have you heard nothing about the challenge he published?"

"What challenge? Come, Trievel, explain yourself."

"Why, the challenge Purruh the watchman published all over the town, announcing, by Master Sebald's order, that your place would be kept, and that you would not dare to come and take it to testify for the God of Jacob, that he challenged you before every one to do so, and if you did not come, as was probable you would not, then people would see you were defeated, trodden under foot, and were ready to ask for mercy. For that reason, he, Sebald, undertook to proclaim by sound of trumpet the victory of the sun's divinity and your signal discomfiture. What, have you never heard anything about these things? Why, people talk of nothing else all about the country; some say you would come, others that you dared not."

The capuchin had turned pale, and his cheeks quivered with anger.

"What, what!" he began to stammer, "this great ass, this materialist, this ignorant cub, this vanity-swollen wine-skin dares to defy me—me—to appear! Oh, this is too much! All I said but now, Trievel, about his good heart and good sense, I retract it all! He is clearly choking with vanity—his head is turned. Yes, I see more clearly than ever, and notwithstanding my feeling of indulgence for him, that he is a stupid, shallow creature, twenty ages behind the rest of the

world. His god the sun! the sun! ha! ha! ha! what a discovery! the religion of the earliest savages! Why, it is truly incredible—it is——”

“Then you will come?” asked Trievel, holding her head down to hide a smile.

“Will I go to defend my God, the God of our fathers? Certainly—certainly! But let no one think I go to eat or to drink—no, this is my sustenance.”

And he showed his potatoes.

“I was getting them ready to go my rounds to-day, but under circumstances so important as these I give it up. I set forth, I march to meet heretics, I go as the sacred King David went to meet the giant Goliath, armed with my crook, my sling, and my three pebbles. So he defies me?”

There was a moment's silence, then Trievel Rasimus muttered—

“Well, I was surprised, Father Johannes, that you remained so quiet: I could not believe at the hour of battle you would remain with your arms crossed in this way, as if you felt you had been worsted beforehand.”

“Worsted beforehand!” began the capuchin. “Listen, Trievel; this day shall you see the triumph of Jehovah, the great God, the jealous God! You may go and tell the Bergzabern people from me——”

“Rest assured,” interrupted the old woman, taking her stick in her hand, “I will spread the news everywhere. The banquet begins at eleven; you had better be there early; all your friends will be there.”

“Yes, Trievel, I reckon on you, and I thank you for coming to give me notice. God of Heaven! when I think had it not been for you the God of armies might have been vanquished this day!”

They left the hut together, and the capuchin, quite revived, having accompanied Trievel Rasimus about fifty yards across the heather, pressed her hand, and repeated—

“Tell every one I am coming; if all the legions of darkness were there with Master Sebald at their head, I shall come.”

Trievel Rasimus then departed, laughing in her sleeve. It was then nearly six in the morning; the sun was gilding the side of the mountain. Just as the old woman reached the path leading to Bergzabern, Johannes was ringing for matins with all his might, and the tinkling of the little bells of Saint John was repeated by echo upon echo down to the foot of the mountain.

CHAPTER XI.



THAT night Sebald slept comfortably from nine in the evening until eight the next morning; the sun was shining through the windows when he awoke. Dame Grédel, Hafenkouker and his sculions, Schweyer and his boys, Christian and Fridoline, and all the male and female servants of the Mayence Ham, had long been up and stirring, coming and going, and giving and receiving the last instructions for the banquet. The autumnal breeze stirred the garlands in the court, the tavern was full of that scent of leaves which one finds at the altars set up in the streets for the Corpus Christi procession, and there was a crowd of curious people under the Trabans' archway, continually

reinforced, gazing at these wonders. Master Sebald turned his head, and saw his great cocked hat, with red and blue rosettes, and his gala clothes on the chest of drawers. Grédel had got everything ready beforehand; she was most careful, and never forgot anything. So the good man got up, and put on his black woollen stockings, shoes with silver buckles, and velvet breeches, which he was already beginning happily to fill out again.

After he had assumed his splendid scarlet waistcoat he opened his window, and when he saw the sombre court, with its lofty oaken gables under the vast arch of the sky, looking like Saint Sylvester's Cathedral, and even more imposingly grand, he was seized with admiration at it; but, instead of shouting with laughter as he once did, and crying, "It is I—I, Frantz Sebald Christian Dick, by the grace of God, who am the author of these things," he became very grave, and remained silent.

For more than an hour the worthy tavern-keeper in his shirt-sleeves, his great grey head in disorder, remained plunged in a pleasant reverie, looking at the long tables covered with their white cloths with red edges, the numberless spoons and forks glittering all along them, the silver tripods which Hafenkouker himself had placed at equal distances to serve the fish, the cellarmen coming up from the cellar bending under the barrel on their shoulders, which was immediately tapped, so they would only have to turn the cock when they were in a hurry.

"Sebald," thought he, "that is very well arranged; you could not have done better yourself."

But what softened him the most was to see Christian and Fridoline together, constructing pyramids of fruits,

flowers, and moss, to ornament the dessert-tables. Christian in a violet velvet Polish jacket, his black cap surmounted by a superb plume of green and gold cock's feathers, his little moustaches turned up, his lips purple, and his eyes sparkling with love; Fridoline in a white dress, a rose in her gracefully-rounded bosom, her hair carefully plaited and braided on her swan-like neck, her transparently rosy cheeks, and her long lashes cast down, moist with tenderness—these two children were looking at each other, blushing, sighing, and cooing together; while Master Sebald looked at them, and felt the pleasant days of his youth come once again.

“How they love one another—how they love one another!” murmured he, with his eyes full of tears; “God of Heaven, how can they love like that!”

Then, thinking of the past, he saw Grédel again as he first saw her, fresh, gracious, and smiling; and he recalled all the pleasant moments they had passed together—the birth of Fridoline, their joy, his wife's gladness, the delight of Grandmother Dick leaning over the little white cradle with clasped hands, murmuring, ‘Dear little angel—come down from heaven to be the joy of my old age—be blest, loved, and adored!’ Then he saw the baby, like a rosebud, and had he been able to paint he would have painted her every day, at every moment of her life; and this love of every instant made but one in his heart—his dear Fridoline. Then he looked at Christian, whom he knew to be a good, affectionate lad, and said to himself, “How happy they will be together—how they will love one another!”

And so his heart grew tender.

Then in the long array of souvenirs the image of his

old companion, Father Johannes, with his red beard, rose up also. He saw the capuchin nursing the child in the large sleeves of his monk's gown, and dancing her in his muscular hands, whilst his brown cheeks were ploughed up with wrinkles and his cracked voice laughed with satisfaction.

When he recollected these things he thought to himself—

“But I cannot marry Fridoline without his being there to give them his blessing. No; that I cannot—it would not be common sense. Johannes must come—why does he not come? Does he think my heart so bad as to bear him malice? Do I think any longer about the blows of his stick? Is not the white wine the cause of it all? Should I not be glad to see him come again? And so would Fridoline, and Grédel, and Christian, and we all. Yes; the capuchin must be here. If he does not come the whole will be a failure. Who can sing ‘Let us drink’ as he can? No one in all Bergzabern. In all Bergzabern? No one in the whole country round—no one in the world. Ah! if he came all would go well.”

And as he involuntarily turned his eyes towards the Trabans' gate he gave several deep sighs.

The tables were all ready. Dame Grédel, Hafenkouker, Christian, and Fridoline returned to the tavern, where many friends of the Mayence Ham had already assembled—Toubac, Hans Aden, Trievel Rasimus, Paul Borbès, Bevel Henné; not forgetting Omacht, the burgomaster, Councillor Baltzer, and a number of other personages of the town.

The crowd began to flow into the court. When Purhus arrived there was a noise like the rolling of a

tempest. It was the mob clambering up the benches. Master Sebald at that moment put on his famous maroon-coloured coat and his grand cocked hat; then with a sigh he opened the door of the old gallery and began gravely to descend the exterior staircase of the tavern amidst universal acclamations. The worthy man forced himself to appear as gay as he ought to be under similar circumstances; but he tried to do so in vain. It was in vain he held himself up, threw his great head back on his shoulders, puffed out his red cheeks, and crossed his hands behind his back. He was no longer the victor among victors at a cock-fight, nor at a donkey-race, and there even seemed to be a bitterness in his once kindly smile.

But the enthusiasm of his friends and acquaintances gave him as yet no leisure for regret, especially when he saw Christian and Fridoline coming up to embrace him. He smiled at Trievel dressed in her gayest apparel, whom Toubac's eyes never quitted for a moment, like a melancholy-looking kite watching a yellow old hen which he would gladly carry off in his talons, but which cares little enough for him in his cage.

Then, raising his cocked hat, he ceremoniously saluted Monsieur Baltzer, the councillor, and Monsieur Omacht, the burgomaster, who were present by right at every fête to drink old Forstheimer which cost them nothing.

Having done thus much Master Sebald thought he had sufficiently acquitted himself of all obligations of that nature, and taking Trievel Rasimus's two hands in his own, he said affectionately—

“Trievel, Trievel! the sight of you rejoices my soul.”

"I quite believe you, Monsieur Dick," replied the old woman coquettishly, ogling Toubac from the corner of her eye in the hope of making him jealous; "I believe you, he! he! he! I don't wonder at it; one knows how to dress oneself, thank God; one could find husbands by the dozen just now. If you had not been married according to the rites of our holy mother church, Master Sebald, I should choose you at once."

"Yes," continued the fat fellow, with much feeling. "It does me much pleasure to see you; you are one of my oldest friends, one I have seen more or less every day for thirty years; you are not one of those who could forget your old friends for the sake of pride and vanity."

"No, indeed," interrupted Trievel, "I stand by the Mayence Ham for life and death."

"Yes, yes, I know it," began Sebald—"I am sure of it."

Then, in a tone of profound indignation, he continued, extending his hands in the direction of the Trabans' gate—

"No one can now accuse me of impatience; if those who ought to be here are absent, is it any fault of mine? Who can now dare to say it is the fault of Frantz Christian Sebald Dick? If any one can say so he must be a scoundrel, for truth is truth; and I have always held falsehood and deceit in horror. Let no one now say that Sebald Dick has not had patience, and that he did not wait until the very last moment; but pride is the destruction of old friendship—yes, pride gives us many a fall."

Then he took three or four turns through the hall, muttering indistinct words to himself, and all the guests understood he was speaking of Father Johannes;

they were exasperated at the capuchin, and said repeatedly—

“He is a man puffed up with pride.”

Outside the uproar and the pattering of feet on the benches became louder than ever; one would have thought the old synagogue was about to fall.

Master Sebald stopped once more before the gateway, and exclaimed—

“He will not come, that is certain; I tell you so confidently, so let the banquet begin; my guests are growing impatient—we must sit down without him.”

Then getting more and more angry—

“How disgraceful! the whole country round will hear how his place was kept there for him, and how it remained empty! Is it not the greatest imaginable disgrace, not only for him, but for me and my whole house? and it is an old friend, my oldest friend, who treats me, Sebald, thus. As far as I am concerned,” he continued, after a moment’s pause, “I say nothing, for we are supposed to have quarrelled; but these children, these dear children, whom he baptised and carried about in his arms, with what can he reproach them, Toubac? Tell me, what can he say against them?”

“I say nothing,” observed Toubac; “what can I say? Only that he is a rascal, a beggar, a true gallows-bird.”

“I don’t say that,” cried Sebald, purple with anger; “we are not all blessed with every good quality; and the man who pretends that Father Johannes is not the best of capuchins, and the worthiest man in the whole country round, will have to answer for it to Frantz Sebald Christian Dick, mind you.”

Then turning towards the gate once more, he stopped for a moment, and then went on—

“I remember the time when my grandmother Orchel repeatedly told us that pride had been our destruction by means of a serpent, and that is the naked truth; the serpent of pride held the apple from the tree of knowledge; and this apple was, so to say, the knowledge of good and evil. Such has always been my opinion, and this day I see I am right, for Father Johannes, on account of his God of Jacob, thinks himself wiser than us all, and——”

That moment the worthy man turned quite white, then red, and exclaimed—

“Here he is! Ha! I knew he would come—I was sure of it—it could not be otherwise.”

Every one rushed to the windows; there stood Father Johannes under the gloomy archway opposite, making his way slowly through the crowd. Master Sebald, with open arms, seemed as if he was going to throw himself into the water and swim to the capuchin's rescue. But the nearer Father Johannes came the more indignation did his lean and bony goatish physiognomy express.

Since his interview with Trievel Rasimus, Johannes had been rolling over in his mind the most terrible arguments possible against the divinity of the sun. He intended to vanquish Sebald and force him to cry for mercy; but at the sight of the ancient tavern, witness of so many happy moments with the glass in his hand and a smile on his lips; of his old companion, with his arms wide open and pleasure painted on his face; of Grédel, Fridoline, Christian, and so many of his old friends smiling and attentive in the shade, his heart

was filled with sadness; he would have exclaimed, "Remove this cup from my lips!" but his natural obstinacy, as well as his pride, got the better of him; so he marched on with his right ear forward and his head down, as if he was going to butt some one, while a tear trickled down from his left eye. This was not an encouraging sign; Sebald let fall his arms and began to stammer—

"What is the matter now? The capuchin looks very angry."

Johannes arrived in front of the tavern; at fifteen paces he suddenly stopped, half closed his eyes to hide his tears, and then with his nose in the air and his head projecting forward, he stretched out his hand and began—

"When the tribes of Levi and Heroboam were received in the tent of the venerable patriarch Sichem, and having yielded up their sister Dinah to that monarch's eldest son, abused his hospitality so far as to exterminate his circumcised sons, the third day of the fever, it was a crime in the face of Jacob, and the Lord blamed their conduct. Now, I come not after that fashion; I come with no treacherous intent. I call to mind your hospitality, respectable Sebald Dick; nor do I forget that your dear child and worthy wife have a hundred times afforded me bread, salt, and a seat by the hearth of your esteemed tavern. It is, then, with sentiments of peace that I seek your presence. But the gratitude of the flesh, respectable Sebald, is one thing, and the fulfilling the duties of the soul is another. Why, then, have you defied me? Why at the sound of trumpets have you provoked Father Johannes? why have you solemnly called upon

him to defend the God of his fathers, his own God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Why, I ask, has your pride hurried you to such an extreme? Here I stand, then, with sentiments of peace, but my loins girded up for war; for such is my duty, such my belief, such the command of our holy religion."

Having thus spoken amidst a profound silence—for every one in the court was listening to him—Father Johannes ceased, and Master Sebald remained for some instants with his mouth wide open, looking perfectly stupefied. Then turning to his wife, who was no less astonished than he—

"Grédel," said he, "did you ever hear anything like this before? Have I defied any one without knowing it? I remember nothing about it if I have. It is terrible—very terrible—we shall have the battle over again."

Father Johannes looked as if he expected a reply; stupefaction was visible on every face. Something serious was evidently anticipated. And while every one was anxious to hear Sebald's reply, Trievel Rasimus winked her eye, took her box from her pocket, and treated herself to a pinch of snuff. She then quietly went and placed herself between Master Sebald and Johannes, and said to them—

"Listen, and be not angry with Trievel Rasimus, for she has acted thus for the satisfaction of all. You are two creatures full of pride and obstinacy; rather than make the first advances you would both of you fret yourselves to death; such dispositions as yours are an abomination.

"What! two old comrades, two God-fearing men like you, are to quarrel for life because one has been drinking red wine and the other white! That is not common

sense. Now I, therefore, seeing things were so, went this morning and told Father Johannes Master Sebald defied him to come and support the cause of the God of Jacob; that moved him thoroughly, and he is come. Now, Monsieur Dick, you know you promised to grant me whatever I might ask. Well, then, embrace your old companion, and let there be peace between you. That is the wish of Trievel Rasimus!"

As the old stocking-darner was speaking, the jolly fat face of Sebald brightened up with pleasure; the capuchin's forehead lost its wrinkles too. They looked with emotion at one another; and when she ceased, the tavern-keeper, opening his arms, began to stammer, overcome by his feelings—

"Father Johannes, Father Johannes, are you still angry with me at such an hour as this?"

Then the capuchin, holding down his head to conceal his tears, mounted the three steps of the tavern, and threw his long sleeves round Sebald's neck, his cheek against his, sobbing.

And they both sobbed together like two babies, stammering—

"He! he! he! hi! hi! hi! what fools we were, what fools we have been!"

All the bystanders cried and embraced one another, without knowing why. Grédel kissed Trievel, Toubac embraced Hans Aden, and those who could not find tears said—

"I cannot find tears to shed, but I feel it more than those who can!"

Others blew their noses; nothing had ever been seen like it.

Borbès was quite ashamed at not being able to cry;

he went and hid himself in the kitchen, when Bevel Henné called him a paltry knave, and said his heart was as hard as a stone.

And he did not know what to say to excuse himself.

There was very general applause in the court, and in the tavern it seemed never likely to cease. At last Master Sebald lifted up his head, and laying both hands on his portly stomach, roared with laughter till the tavern windows shook. He could not contain himself, and Father Johannes by his side laughed too, like an old he-goat when he is let out into the woods when winter is gone by, and he smells the honeysuckle in the hedges—tears of pleasure ran down into his beard.

At last all was quiet again. Grédel wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, Christian and Fridoline began dancing, and all the company repeated in chorus—

“Ha! ha! ha! The good times are come again; pints and quarts, sausages and black puddings, will be the order of the day for the next generation!”

“Trievel, Trievel!” cried Sebald, “you had already rescued me from Eselskopf’s clutches, and now you bring my old companion Johannes back to me—you are the best woman in the world.”

Then taking Johannes by the arm, he told him how Trievel had saved his life; then suddenly interrupting himself, he said—

“But that is not all, my poor old capuchin; you always come at the right moment. Here, Christian, Fridoline, come hither!”

He had just finished speaking, when the bands of the Sour Herring, that of the Three Puddings, and of the Fat Ox marched into the court; they could hear Rosselkasten calling out—

“Clear the way, clear the way!”

Then three taps on the big drum, cymbals clashed, clarionets squeaked, and an increasing clamour announced that the mob had clambered on to the roof of the synagogue.

“Christian, Fridoline!” continued the worthy tavern-keeper, “come hither!”

The two children approached in a state of agitation, and Master Sebald spoke gravely as follows:—

“Grédel, Johannes, Trievel Rasimus, and all of you, listen to me. This is the happiest day of my life, for, thanks be to God, I begin to recover my appetite, and besides, I have found my old companion Johannes again. For this reason I am well pleased, and it is my wish others should be so too; I wish joy to abound in my house, and that we should all live together like the birds of the air: pigeons, bullfinches, blackbirds, thrushes, and tomtits, who build in the same tree, some at the top, others lower down, and others again in the grass below, such as warblers, partridges, and quails, but all in peace together, singing, rejoicing, and celebrating the glory of the Lord. Our young people must also so come together, and produce new generations of healthy and happy creatures, so that the good seed may multiply before the face of Heaven, according to the word of the Lord; is it not so, capuchin?”

Johannes nodded his head, and Christian and Fridoline became as red as poppies. Dame Grédel began crying again, and old Trievel took pinch upon pinch of snuff.

“Therefore,” continued Sebald, resuming the thread of his discourse, “here are two young creatures who seem to love one another, and to be of accord in labour-

ing in the Lord's vineyard. My daughter, Gretchen Fridoline Dick, yesterday entered her eighteenth year, and Kasper Christian Diemer will be twenty-one next Christmas. What do you say to it? Shall we marry them?"

Then there was a great commotion in the hall, and Christian began—

"Oh, Master Sebald, Master Sebald!" and there he stopped, for joy was suffocating him.

"If we marry them," repeated the good man, "would you give them your blessing, Father Johannes?"

"They are good children, and I love them dearly," murmured the capuchin softly. "I will give them my blessing with all my heart."

"Well, then," said Master Sebald, "Christian, embrace Fridoline, your affianced bride. In a fortnight she shall be your wife."

As he spoke, Christian, waving his cap in the air, uttered a shout of triumph, and taking Fridoline in his arms, kissed her, and pressed her to his heart.

The poor child, in her confusion, hid her face on his breast. One would have thought they were about to fly up to heaven together.

And, strangely enough, the three bands immediately began to play, "O mon âme, mon âme adorée," from Mozart's *Flûte Enchantée*: either Master Sebald had previously given orders to that effect, or it was a special interposition of Providence on that occasion.

During the performance of that noble piece every one was silent; then the worthy tavern-keeper, in a tone of great feeling, continued—

"I give her to you to love her, honour her, and make her happy. But listen attentively to what I now say,

Christian, you must not abandon the noble art of painting; you shall live without anxiety, without troubles of any sort, with us, but a painter you must be. Men must always have some employment, and what can be finer than to reproduce the works of God on canvas, and in the colours of life? While I was in Holland I saw wherever I went their favourite taverns painted by very great painters, where they drank ale and porter, and made a great consumption of sour herrings and cod fried in sweet oil. You—you shall drink Rhine wine, and eat black puddings, and you shall be painter in ordinary to the Mayence Ham, the court of the Trabans, and the old synagogue."

"Don't be uneasy, Father Sebald," interrupted Christian, inspired with a sudden idea; "do not trouble yourself about me—I will be a painter; and there," said he, pointing to the lofty and smoke-begrimed wall of the tavern—"there all Bergzabern shall come to see my first performance; the verdant sides of the Braumberg covered with vines up to the clouds, the knotted stems bending with the weight of their purple grapes. Father Johannes crowned with vine-leaves as the god Bacchus, and you, Papa Sebald, round, jolly, stained with wine-lees, sitting on the ass Eselskopf, with his tongue hanging out, are going to take possession of the noble Johannisberg vineyards with your nursling. Your belly shall be in shape like a bagpipe, you shall be the good, worthy, and venerable Silenus, and all along the road you shall see inns, hotels, taverns, and wineshops wide open to receive you, as far as you can see."

"Ha! ha!" said the fat man, whose eyes were wide open with admiration—"a very fine design in idea,

Christian, and I hope, please God, you will be able to execute it as I picture it to myself. But now it is time to sit down to dinner—we will talk this over another time.”

Just then Saint Sylvester's clock struck twelve.

After the overture to the *Flûte Enchantée* there was one immense murmur in the court; all shouting had ceased, every one was in his place; the guests seated at the tables, the musicians on their benches above; the coopers, with their leather aprons, standing by the barrels; the female servants in short red skirts and short sleeves; the scullions and cellarmen at their posts; the crowd everywhere, at the windows, in the lofts, on the roofs, under the gloomy arch of the Trabans, and even in the turret of Saint Sylvester's Church, for Pétroupe, the bellringer, had let seats there at so much a head.

They were all waiting for the signal to begin the fête. Then Frantz Sébald Christian Dick threw open the folding-doors of the tavern, and this vast spectacle met his sight. The court looked like an immense flower-basket containing the impatient crowd; the benches seemed to bend under the weight of the multitude, and the faces of all, young and old, showed the greatest attention. On the grand stand, erected against the wall of the old synagogue, the three bands were stationed, the big drum most conspicuous, while horns, trumpets, cymbals, and trombones glittered in the sun around it. On the highest bench in the stand four trumpeters were stationed erect, dressed half in red, the other half in yellow, blue, or violet, in the ancient halberdier costume, just as the knaves in the different suits are depicted in our present packs of

cards; they held long bent trumpets, with tassels embroidered in gold and silver, to their lips; their caps over their ears, and one hand on the hip, at a distance they looked like four caryatides supporting the roof. As soon as Master Sebald showed himself at the tavern door these four musicians began to blow the ancient trumpet call, sounded before Duke Rodolphe when he entered Bergzabern in 1575. The echoes of these strange sounds made one fancy the extinct generations of Bergzabern were about to reappear at the great banquet at the Mayence Ham.

The magnificent arrangements for the feast excited Father Johannes' admiration more than anything else; the three wild boars in large silver dishes, each with a bunch of fennel in his mouth, roebucks, blackcocks, peacocks with their tails expanded, woodcocks, pheasants, vases of flowers, pyramids of fruits, enormous painted soup-tureens, crawfish, and quantities of other dishes, added to which the glitter of the silver plate which rich old Sebald had taken out of his strong boxes for the first time—all that astonished and dazzled the capuchin, who sniffed up the smell of the soup and other hot dishes as he opened his eyes as wide as he could, and stood on tiptoe to see as much of the spectacle as possible.

The grand old chased tankards and long-necked beakers foaming with red wine did not fail to attract the attention they merited from him, and there is every reason to believe the worthy capuchin in no wise regretted having left his hermitage that morning, nor having bid a tolerably long farewell to his late diet of potatoes roasted in ashes.

Then Master Sebald, with his large grizzled head

uncovered, walked gravely across the court, leading Fridoline by the hand; then followed Christian and Dame Grédel, Father Johannes and Trievel Rasimus, Toubac and Bevel Henné—in fact, all the old attached friends of the house. When they had taken their places, all the other guests who had remained standing up sat down, and Master Sebald alone remained erect at the end of the middle table. Then in a serious and impressive tone he said—

“My dear friends and companions, and all of you, whoever you may be, either inhabitants of this good town, or even strangers to it, on this, the Lord’s day, we celebrate my happy return to health, for which we render thanks to Heaven, and not to Doctor Eselskopf, who is an ass; you may take my word for it; I tell you so, that every one may know it and remember it. We also celebrate our reconciliation with the good, worthy, and venerable Father Johannes, the friend of our heart, and our brother in God. Lastly, we celebrate the espousals of our dear daughter, Gretchen Fridoline, with the young painter Christian Diemer, and we give you notice that this fortnight you are hereby all invited to come here once more to celebrate their wedding, which shall be done in a manner befitting the well-beloved daughter of Frantz Christian Sebald Dick. And now, my dear friends and companions, let us eat, drink, and rejoice, and let us enjoy all the good things the Lord has bestowed upon His children.”

Shouts of applause rose to the clouds.

And Master Sebald, seating himself opposite the capuchin, plunged his ladle into the excellent crayfish soup.

CATHERINE'S SUITORS.





CATHERINE'S SUITORS.



CHAPTER I.



DO not believe there ever was a better kitchen or one with a larger fire in it in all Alsace than that belonging to the inn called the Carp, kept by Catherine Koenig, in the village of Neudorf, near Huningen.

In 1812 Catherine was approaching her twenty-fourth birthday; she was fresh-looking, gay, and plump. It would be difficult to find a more enticing figure, the more so that she always dressed in the regular Neudorf costume, a wide skirt with red and white stripe, long in the waist, the corset ornamented with shoulder-straps, and her brown hair carefully brushed and combed, and confined in its rustic cap of black silk.

She was really very pleasing. Her chin, which was rather full, her rosy cheeks, straight nose, just a little turned up at the end, teeth as white as ivory, and lips

like a bunch of cherries, charmed you as you looked at them, and gave you an idea of abundance and satisfaction together.

Therefore all the big-wigs in the country, carriers, waggoners, who in those days were always going and coming between Mulhouse and Basle, in Switzerland, used to stop at the Carp. You should have seen how Catherine received them and made much of them, how she would tap them on the shoulder, with—

“So it is you, Andreusse! Ah, here you are at last. How long the time has seemed to me since you went away! Do you know, Andreusse, you are getting as scarce as a sunshiny day! What are you going to have? Breakfast? Yes, to be sure, we must wind the kitchen clock up. Here, Katel, Orchel, lay the cloth for our friend Andreusse. I happen to have a leg of mutton just done; you must tell me what you think of it. Kasper, put the horses in the stable, and the carriage under the shed. Don't forget it belongs to Andreusse; see the manger is full of oats. There, now, that is settled. Now you are here again I am satisfied.”

And she was such a good cook. They would not have gone anywhere else for an empire. When the moment came for paying the bill they did not dare to haggle about a groschen with such a good landlady, and then, to say truth, Catherine was tenacious about her old customers; she never overcharged them; her wine was always good.

“Now, gossip Andreusse, sit down and have a good breakfast.”

The waggoner would walk into the great room of the inn, where three or four of his fellow-carriers, who

had arrived the same morning or the evening before, were waiting for him; their glasses tinkled, the bottles gurgled, and the leg of mutton dressed with garlic filled the house with its smell.

And this was the way Catherine carried on her business, this was how she received her customers; whether their names were Andreusse, Jean Claude, or Nicolas, it was all the same, they were always friends and old acquaintances.

It is needless to say that Catherine, with her ten acres of vineyard, which were the finest and best cultivated of any on the hillside, her large meadow, called the Three Oaks, her flourishing inn, barns, distillery, poultry-yard, &c., with her sparkling but sometimes tender eyes and joyful laugh, was in no want of suitors round about. She could have told them by dozens; it was curious to see them file in on Sundays and holidays, with the excuse of taking a bit of bread and a glass of wine before going to mass; it looked like a procession.

John Noblat, the brewer, was generally the first, a strong fellow with a fair beard, who would take five or six turns in the kitchen, with his hands behind his back, thinking over a declaration which he never could find courage to make; he would make all sorts of inquiries about the house, the vintage, about this and that, cough, take a side-look at Catherine, who would answer with indifference, and then he would walk off to the great room, saying to himself—

“I will do it another time; she did not seem in a very good humour this morning. I will see about it next Sunday.”

Then came Conrad Schœffer, the horse-dealer, in a

long grey woollen jacket, large hat, and pointed beard, bowing to the ground.

"May the Lord bless you, Catherine!" he would begin, squinting like a goat; "you are always fresh and rosy, smiling and contented. He! he! he!"

To which Catherine would reply—

"You are very good, Monsieur Schœffer. Walk in, walk in, your glass of wine is all ready; John Noblat is there waiting for you."

Schœffer hesitates—he would like to say something besides, but the presence of the servant checks him; so he turns his steps in the direction of Noblat, in a reverie, his great dog following him with his tail between his legs.

Then Michel Matter, the Tiefenbronn miller, walks in, wearing a sky-blue jacket, with his merry face and curly red hair, and his otter-skin cap on one side of his head; he laughs till the plates over the kitchen dresser shake again; he almost shuts his eyes; he feels quite enterprising at the sight of Catherine, and he calls out in a voice of thunder—

"Ha! neighbour, when are we to get married? Ah, ha! when is it to be settled? Ah, Catherine, Catherine, you keep me languishing too long. Come, now, once for all, tell me, shall it be next month, or Midsummer's day, or the week with three Thursdays?"

"Ah, Monsieur Michel," replies Catherine, "what are you talking about? I am sure you don't mean it."

"I don't mean it? Yes, indeed I do," cries the miller, taking Catherine by the waist.

Then she gets angry, and some of the others coming by, say, half angry and half laughing—

"That fellow Michel does not know how to behave himself—are those your manners?"

"Mind your own business," cries Michel; "you have nothing to do with it."

And that was a termination of his courtship too; he went into the room frowning, and cursing the women, who never know what they want, and they will always have the last word.

Michel Matter had hardly seated himself before his wine, grumbling between his teeth, before old Rebstock, the mayor of the commune, presented himself in his turn in the kitchen. Rebstock was the richest wine-grower in Neudorf; he wore a square-tailed coat, red waistcoat, and knee-breeches; his face was red, his nose purple, his head bald, with two grey curls round his ears. He took off his cocked hat, and stood at the door for a moment with an air of admiration, looking at the lofty brown beams in the roof, the great blazing chimney, the shelves on which the round-bellied soup-tureens and painted dishes were placed, and snuffing up the smell of roast mutton, or goose, or young rabbit, admiring the well-swept flagstones, and pots and pans, all shining against the wall; his face grew quite cheerful.

"How comfortable I could be here!" thought he.

Catherine saw him come in, but she pretended to be looking in another direction; she skimmed the broth, lifted up the lids of the saucepans, gave orders to old Salomé, while he watched her, fetched a long sigh, and cried—

"Good morning, Catherine—here I am!"

Then she turned round.

"Ah! Monsieur Rebstock, welcome; I did not ex-

pect you so soon. What can have made you come so soon?"

"What can have brought me here so early, Catherine? Can you ask me?"

Then he half-closed his eyes, coughed, and continued—

"Can you ask me? are you ignorant how I suffer on account of you? Ah, Catherine, my poor heart has never, never felt so much—not even in the days of my youth, when I was courting my late poor wife."

She looked down, and put on a schoolgirl's look while she put some salt into the soup. Then after hearing old Rebstock sigh several times, she added—

"Ah! Monsieur Rebstock, you are still the greatest deceiver in the village. We poor women, how virtuous we ought to be! Good Lord! Take care, Salomé, the mutton is burning!"

"Deceiver!" cried the old vinedresser. "You know very well my intentions are honourable. Come now, I am not joking."

When she saw a formal declaration was impending she called out—

"Oh dear! I forgot to tap the great barrel of wine, and this is Sunday! I beg your pardon, Monsieur Rebstock, but I must make haste. Come with me, Kasper; Salomé, you attend to the meat."

And she disappeared in the cellar.

Then Rebstock nodded his head, and said drily—

"Salomé, give me a pint of wine and a sausage."

Then in his turn he walked into the great room in a very bad humour, sending Catherine, in his heart, to the devil; but yet she had such a vineyard, such a well-established house, and such bright louis d'or!

"She must be in love with some one else," thought

he—"yes, that must be the case. Some young fellow without a penny, for certain; all women are alike—they only look at a man's face."

Thereupon the old vinedresser seated himself at the end of the table, against the wall, which was papered with views in Switzerland, with green mountains, blue vines, and brickdust roads.

Others kept coming in—Nickel Finck, the iron-monger; Zapheri Götz, the blacksmith; Jacob Yaeger, the head keeper; Joseph Kroug, Christophel Heuné, and I know not how many more; and Catherine had wit enough to keep them all back without reducing any of them to despair, for she cared a good deal about selling her wine, her sausages, and her white bread. On Sundays it was so much gained, and one must think of everything. Ah, she was sharp enough, and was naturally clever in seeing through men; she had made up her mind a hundred times not to marry, and one may say she was right. You had only to look into every home in the village, one after the other, to find out that marriage produces more blows from a cudgel than tit-bits, and chiefly for the women. The men make up for it at the public-house, but the women—good Lord! they must indeed feel a vocation for it to run such a terrible risk.

So Catherine was in no particular hurry to marry, and it seemed hard to pass one's life alone in the world. It is true, when one gets up in the morning to go to work, when the inn is full of people, the horses are stamping in the stable, some want their breakfasts before starting, and others arrive just at daybreak; when fires must be lighted in the kitchen, the public room, and in the private rooms; when one has to hurry

to the cellar to fill the bottles, to the stable to see the racks are full of hay, to give orders to the servants, men and women, listen to questions—madame, the baker wants to see you ; here is the butcher ; madame, which barrel am I to draw the wine for Jacob from ? &c. ; when one wants roast, another boiled, a third an omelet and salad—it is very true all that helps to pass the time, and one has only time to attend to business. But when evening comes, and one is tired of running about, when one's turn comes to sit down to one's dinner ; and again, when every one else is asleep and one goes up to one's solitary room, then, indeed, one's ideas often change, and one finds it very dull to be alone.

I do not know whether such ideas as these ever occurred to Catherine, but sometimes when she entered her room over the house-door at night, after setting her candle down on the table with a sigh, she would draw the curtain a little on one side, and watch the young schoolmaster Heinrich Walter as he sat alone in his garret under the gable on the other side of the street, opposite the lamp, as he studied some old books with red edges, and raised his great melancholy eyes from time to time from his book to the ceiling. She could distinguish his bed at the end of the room, on the right four shelves for books, and near the window a small deal table with an inkstand upon it ; all that seemed so dismal to her that it was enough to bring tears into her eyes.

Heinrich Walter might have been about five-and-twenty. God knows the pains he had taken for the last eighteen months to teach the village children orthography, arithmetic, sacred history ; to be civil and respectable, not to wipe their noses with their

fingers, nor to go yelling about the streets; not to steal their neighbours' fruit, nor to go begging along the roads on Thursdays and Sundays. Well, the poor young man could not boast any great success; on the contrary, the whole village was on bad terms with him; the women laughed at his old threadbare black coat, his battered cocked hat, his pale face, his old breeches, and darned stockings. At last they lost all shame with regard to him, and why? Because he happened to say one day to the children during school hours—

“My dear friends, if you go on as you do now, you all will be as great asses as your fathers and mothers; my predecessor, M. Imant, could never succeed in teaching them B—A, BA, and I shall never be able to get you to learn the difference between number 1 and number 2.”

It was a sad truth, these unfortunate children were as quick at counting on their fingers as they were slow at doing a sum in addition on a slate.

But from that day forward Walter had the reputation of being the most stupid, the palest and leanest school-master in Alsace. It had even been proposed at the municipal council to stop paying the two hundred francs which he drew from the commune—not exactly the right way, I think, to make him any fatter.

Such was the poor fellow whom Catherine watched every night before she went to bed, and, strange to say, the more she looked at him the less ugly he seemed to her; his white face, high forehead, with brown curly hair, his tender and melancholy lips, all had the effect of softening Catherine—everything down to his very short sleeves, whence his long lean hands protruded

and his hollow cheeks, and blue lines which encircled his large dreamy eyes.

"Yes, he looks gentle," thought she, "and good—and handsome too! Yes, he is handsome. I like him quite as well as Michel Matter, with his broad shoulders, or Jacob Yaeger, with his moustaches a yard long. They may say what they will, he is not an ugly man; he only wants to laugh a little oftener; if he swallowed a quarter of the liquor that Joseph Kroug or old Rebstock takes, he would be as fresh and as healthy as any one in the village."

So argued Catherine.

Perhaps it was the little lamp which set off Walter in her eyes; but there was one other circumstance which had interested her in the poor young man, and that was, Walter could not see her even at a distance without blushing, and often when she had been out during the harvest with her great straw hat on her head, with her sickle in her hand, and her rake over her shoulder, either reaping or haymaking, she noticed that Walter, from behind the texts and copies hanging in the window, thinking he could not be seen, used to stand on tiptoe, and follow her with a long tender look. Then she used to feel quite proud; her heart began to beat faster, and she would not even dare to turn her head round, but hurried on all the faster, to appear as if she had noticed nothing.

And such are women; this Catherine, who was so gay and laughed so heartily in her own kitchen, who was on such good terms with Michel Matter, Joseph Kroug, Nickel Finck—all the fine men in the village, in fact—was always dreaming about the large brown eyes and lean shoulders of a simple schoolmaster

and sometimes she used to hum an old air beginning with something about a pale youth and tender looks, and other similar nonsense. She would cry with emotion, and murmur to herself as she went to bed, "Yes, I am sure he loves me—yes, I am sure of it," which caused her sleep to be sweet indeed.

Nor was Catherine mistaken. Heinrich Walter loved, or rather adored her; his eyes were never tired of gazing at her; he thought Catherine the most beautiful, the most graceful, and most admirable of God's creatures; if he only heard her voice at a distance, the poor fellow's heart would jump. The idea of ever being able to be near her, or to touch her hand, had never come into his head; he, the son of a poor Hirschland woodcutter, without fortune, and with no other resource whatever but his poor situation as communal school-master, could he ever dare to encourage hopes so vain? He would have blushed at his own presumption, but for all that he was in love with Catherine, and he thought about her night and day, even during school hours.

The feeling was too much for him; particularly in summer, or at haymaking or harvest time, on those fine days when all the birds of the air are singing, when thousands of insects fill the air with their buzzing, and the heat is so great that our eyelids close of themselves; with both his elbows on the desk before him, and resting his forehead on his hands, poor Walter indulged in extravagant visions; he forgot where he was, and dreamed for hours together.

The school-children, with their red cheeks and staring eyes, might chatter, move about, yawn, sneeze, clamber over the benches in their sabots, in their impatience to go away—they could not rouse him. He heard nothing;

his thoughts were among the daisies and the thousands of field flowers waving their blue and white heads one above the other, in the wind; he was listening to the bees humming, or looking at the grasshoppers jumping around him in thousands; then his bosom glowed with happiness, in fancy he was breathing the free air of the fields; in the distance the short skirts of the gleaners were fluttering in the breeze, their wide straw hats blown back; their rakes were in motion in concert, and there was Catherine to be seen among them, sligher, taller, and more graceful than any, helping and directing them.

What attention he paid to this picture of his imagination, and how happy he felt!

Towards evening, when the great waggon loaded above their tailboards crawled slowly back to Neudorf, when the mowers with their shining scythes on their shoulders and their whetstones hanging to their waist-belts, with their shirt-sleeves rolled up, followed them, and the haymakers sitting on the top of the hay-carts like a nest of redbreasts sang in chorus to the melancholy old song of "Rinaldo," or some other ancient air of the same description, then, when he listened attentively, he could distinguish Catherine's voice from the rest, and to him it seemed like the voice of an angel in paradise; he dared not breathe lest he should lose a note, and then was the time to see him get up, and, standing on tiptoe, peep over the copies and texts in the window.

All the time they were unloading the hay-carts he never stirred, but watched and admired Catherine with raptures of delight. Then when she had gone into the house he still remained looking at the fine horses with

their heads hanging down, and the great oxen in the yoke with their eyes shut, and dozing as they stood there with the foam dropping from their jaws.

He loved the oxen and the horses because they were Catherine's; he counted the trusses and sheaves that the bright pitchforks flung into the loft, where old Salomé stood to receive them with open arms, and he blessed the Lord of mercies for all the benefits He showered down on Catherine's head.

And when the clock struck five, all the boys jumped up, snatching up their caps and their satchels, and scrambled down across the benches, calling out triumphantly—

“Good evening, Monsieur Walter—good evening!”

Then he used to look at the dial with astonishment, and mutter—

“Already! how fast the time has flown to-day!”

Then from the schoolhouse door he followed with his eyes the children running like hares and dispersing in the different streets, happy to be again at liberty.

“Happy times!” thought he—“happy times! and I was as happy as they fifteen years ago.”

He used to regret those bygone days, for to be hopelessly in love is, it must be admitted, but a sorry state of things. The week-days, however, were his best, for he could dream as he liked; but on Sundays, when he saw all the wealthy men in the village go to the Carp and take their pints of wine in the great room, then it was he suffered the most, and could not help repining at his sad lot.

“Good Lord!” thought he, “when one sees people fortunate enough to sit down in that house, look at Mademoiselle Catherine, and even talk to her, well

may they say some are born under a lucky, others under an unlucky star."

And that is the reason why Heinrich Walter was so melancholy. If he only knew that Catherine looked at him every evening as he was sitting over his books, if he only knew that already she did not think him ugly, and that she often said to herself, "Poor young man, he looks gentle and timid, I like him better than Michel Matter, Finck," &c.—if he only knew that such were the reflections in which Catherine indulged as she looked at him, he would have rendered thanks to Heaven for making him pale and lean, poor and melancholy, which had attracted the notice of so compassionate a person. But he knew it not, and kept his love to himself, not to excite the ill-will of the principal personages in the place, for they would assuredly have contrived his dismissal had they suspected anything. Besides, when he saw all the villagers looking stout and fresh, while he was so pale and so lean, he considered himself ugly and almost deformed. We all know that one must have fat red cheeks and scarlet ears to be considered a handsome man in the Brisgau, and without those charms there is no chance of success.

Now it happened that old Rebstock, as he went to his vineyard every morning early, noticed Heinrich Walter leaning against the wall of the schoolhouse, and so absorbed in his own reflections that he never noticed the people who passed along the road. Heinrich was accustomed to sweep out the schoolroom, light his fire, and put his pot on early in the morning. When he had done that he went out to look at the sun as he rose behind the blue mountains of the Schwartz-Wold; he listened to the quail calling its companions

in the barley, and the cocks challenging from the different farms. It was a real delight to him to see the larks rise in the misty sky as the pale light of day increased, and then to hear them pouring down their floods of song as they looked like dots in the air; and the dogs, who then crawl out of their kennels and prowl from door to door round the heaps of manure; and the first sound of the cowherd's horn, collecting his beasts near the fountain; then the cottages opening one by one, gossips scratching their heads and calling to one another, barefooted children in their shirts coming in and out like young white rabbits; and then the herd which comes along two by two or four by four, the goats leading with projecting beards, and their large pale eyes full of strange light, trotting and skipping along; and the poor sheep always baaing and complaining; then the beautiful cows and great oxen, lowing, with outstretched necks and open mouths; and lastly the pigs, with their round backs and curly tails, grubbing in all the filth they can find; all this confused troop of animals which hurry on or lag behind, and go fast or slow according as the dog is before or behind them; this whirlpool of dust which disappears by degrees along the dusty road in the purple light of dawn; all that was the life and happiness of Walter, for while he was looking at these things he was dreaming about Catherine; he pictured her to himself as always young and handsome, knowing nothing of his love for her, but accompanied by his good wishes through a long and quiet life.

Such contemplations could not be alleged against him as a crime; they hurt no one; but Rebstock, when he saw him in the same place several days in succession,

began to grow suspicious, and these suspicions notably increased when one morning he saw Catherine in a short woollen skirt gathering vegetables behind the hedge in her own garden. A long way off, for he was very clear-sighted, he noticed she rose from time to time and peeped at the schoolhouse, and as quietly stole a little nearer ; he soon felt no doubt on the subject.

“Ah ! ah !” said he to himself, “now I understand why Catherine won’t listen to me ; she is in love with the schoolmaster, that’s clear !”

The old fox knew very well that women are all the more obstinate for being contradicted, and sometimes it puts ideas into their heads which might not have been there before ; so he took care to make no observations on the subject, but he determined to get rid of Heinrich Walter.

And that was the reason why one fine morning, five or six days after, one heard the bell at the town-house ring to assemble the municipal council. It was about the beginning of August, during the grain harvest ; so every one was astonished, for at that season they all preferred attending to their own affairs than those of the parish, and the council rarely met then. Notwithstanding, every one thought it must be something of importance, so they put on their Sunday clothes and cocked hats to see what it might be.

About eight all the members of the council were present—namely, Conrad Schœffer, Michel Matter, Christophel Heuné, &c. When they had all taken their seats, Father Rebstock rose, laid his cocked hat on the table, and with great gravity spoke as follows :—

“It was an abomination to feed idlers at the expense of the parish, people who remained sitting from seven

in the morning till midday, and from one to five in the afternoon, by a good fire in winter, and with the windows open to the fresh air in summer, while hundreds of hard-working people were shivering before their own doors chopping wood, or else sweating blood and water, mowing, reaping, and digging in the heat of the sun."

Then raising his voice, he went on—

"I refer to Heinrich Walter when I say this—to that individual who called fathers of families, and the best bourgeois in Neudorf, the least of whom are a thousand times better than he, a pack of donkeys. This has only lately come to my ears, otherwise I should have known what steps to take long ago. Who or what is this Walter thus to despise every one of us? A beggar who lives at our expense without rendering the least service to the parish.

"In former years we had at least the benefit of hearing the schoolmaster singing in the choir; old Imant, notwithstanding his great age, had a magnificent voice; but this fellow sings like a cricket in dry grass—we can hardly hear him; our poor curé is obliged to sing for both, and run the risk of breaking a bloodvessel, because this fellow Walter will not give himself the trouble of opening his mouth.

"And what is still worse, when people are going to their work in the morning, they can see that great booby taking the air with his hands in his pockets, and staring over at the Carp as if he expected larks already roasted to tumble into his mouth. He takes no notice whatever of those who are going to dig potatoes for him; oh, yes, such a great personage as he would think himself disgraced if he took off his hat to you. I am

surprised he has not asked for an increase of salary, that he may hire some woman to come and make his soup, cut his bread, and wash his carrots and potatoes. Now this must be put a stop to; we must ask for another schoolmaster, an older man, with good lungs, and a sensible fellow. We shall then have a schoolmaster good for something. But go and ask Monsieur Walter to earn the two hundred francs we pay him! I tell you we must ask for another schoolmaster, a married man—that is my opinion.”

Then Rebstock sat down, and as they were all in a hurry, they all agreed with him. Wendling, the secretary, drew up a minute of their unanimous decision, each man signed it, so that he could go to work again immediately, and between eight and nine, without having been heard in his defence, or for any fault of his, Walter was as good as discharged from his situation.

But the great news was only spread abroad in the evening, for that day nearly all Neudorf was in the fields, tying up the sheaves. Fortunately, however, Rebstock and the other friends of the Carp were not out of their troubles. One is quite right in saying that man proposes and God disposes; I believe men would do better to allow Him to propose and dispose without their interference, then they would not have occasion to repent so often.

CHAPTER II.



THAT day there was not a soul left in the house except old Salomé and her mistress; Orchel and Kasper had set off early in the morning with the waggon and oxen, and as the waggoners and carriers were all equally busy at home, the turnspit had a rest for the first time for the last three weeks.

It was so close and so hot that the shutters towards the street had been closed on account of the sun, and the windows in the shade looking into the garden thrown open to let in the air, which did not prevent the heat from being very oppressive. Catherine felt oppressed and restless; she did not know which way to turn herself; she went upstairs and downstairs like a soul in purgatory; she opened her presses, looked at her piles of linen, then mused, looked at old Salomé, who was dozing by the hearth instead of peeling potatoes, and occasionally half opened her eyes, took a good pinch of snuff, and then went on with her work.

At last, after an hour passed thus, just as the church clock struck nine, Catherine gently opened one of the shutters towards the street, and looked towards the schoolhouse. Walter was there, leaning with his elbows on the window-sill, and seemed paler and more absent than ever; he was looking into the street with an especially miserable air. After Catherine had contemplated him for some time in the shade, she noiselessly closed the shutter again and went up to Salomé, who by this time was decidedly fast asleep, and snoring like an organ-pipe.

A dusty ray of the sun just crossed the dark kitchen and quivered in the chimney and on the cat's back and ears, which was also asleep. Outside, save a perpetual buzzing, all was still.

Catherine stood looking at her old servant, then touched her on the shoulder and awoke her. Salomé opened her eyes as wide as she could when she saw her mistress standing before her.

"Ah, madame! I beg your pardon, I was fast asleep—it is so hot. I will make haste."

"No, Salomé, never mind," said Catherine gently, "I did not awake you on that account; I might as well have let you sleep, only—I want to ask your advice about something. I know—I am sure you are attached to me."

"Attached to you, madame! If you were my own child I could not look after your interest more than I do."

Then after another good pinch she put her snuff-box in the pocket of her apron, and asked—

"But, good Lord! what is the matter, then?"

"Come," began Catherine—"come into the great room, it is cooler there; bolt the door that no one may come in."

As she spoke Catherine bolted the door herself, then they went into the room where the benches and tables were hardly visible in the shade, while the holes in the shutters shone like gold. One of the shutters was ajar, and the large white roses could be seen swinging backwards and forwards against the wall. From time to time a bee came humming in the sunlight and then was off again.

This Salomé was a sharp old woman, who knew a

good many things; she had been married once upon a time to a certain hussar named Barabas Heck, who ruled her most imperiously; so she very quickly perceived something extraordinary was going to happen, and she almost guessed what it might be.

"Let us sit down," said Catherine, pointing to a chair, and seating herself on a corner of the bench near the window.

One could hardly see a prettier girl than Catherine looked just then, with her large blue eyes and timid air. The old servant pushed her grey hair back under her cap, and looked at her without speaking.

For some time Catherine remained silent, not knowing exactly how to begin; at last, raising her voice a little, she said—

"Yes, I am sure you are fond of me, Salomé, and that is why I want to ask your advice. You know all the bachelors in the village, young and old,—Yaeger, Matter, Schoeffer, John Noblat, and even old Rebstock—are always running after me."

"Ah! ah!" thought Salomé, "I was sure it was that." Then she said—"Good heavens! madame, that is nothing very wonderful, for it would be difficult to find two girls in the village, or anywhere near, as well made, smiling, and well-looking as you are, let alone your house and lands and——"

"True," interrupted Catherine; "but now tell me whom you would advise me to choose, supposing I wanted to marry some one; for living as I do, Salomé, without family ties, is very hard. Why should I work for nothing and no one?"

"To be contented and satisfied," said Salomé, "and to enjoy all the pleasures of life, that is certain,

madame. I have often been surprised you have not thought so before."

"Then," replied Catherine, "you recommend me to get married?"

"Of course, of course I do. You see, madame, marriage is a pleasant thing enough if you are lucky in your choice; for there are rogues enough about, God knows; plenty, like my old Barabas, to work you to death; but a young, good-looking man, who does whatever you like, takes you out sometimes to a dance—such a one, madame, is the pleasure of your life; in comparison with that the rest is not worth talking about."

They looked at one another for a few seconds, and then Catherine said, with an air of doubt—

"Perhaps you may be right, Salomé; but whom am I to choose?"

"Ah, that is a very difficult question to answer; it depends so much on colours and tastes; there are the dark, the fair, and the chestnut-haired, and the red-haired, the grey, and even the white-headed ones too, who are not to be despised, but they are rare, very rare. Now I would have nothing to say to either white or grey; like old Rebstock, for example, well preserved as he may be. And then you know old fellows are often stingy; they are often out of humour; they sit coughing in an arm-chair all day, seldom good-tempered, or so rarely, that it happens about the thirty-second of every month. Besides that, madame, the grey and the white are frightfully jealous; they see everything and distrust everything. No, madame, trust me, take my advice, and have nothing to do with the grey or the white."

"And the red?" asked Catherine.

"The red, that is another thing; they have some good qualities, but beware the stick—for example, Matter, the miller; well, I am sure he is not the man to stick at trifles with his wife if he had one. Now he is ready enough to laugh; he tries to kiss you; he is always crying out—'Ha! ha! ha!' Very good, I understand all that; my Barabas was red-haired, and he never spared me the cudgel. It is very hard not to know for a moment what to do to please them. And then they are as distrustful as the devil, just like the old ones; and what is worse, they are so treacherous; you think you may laugh, and then you find that makes them angry; they never say what they think. But still, if you have an inclination for Matter——"

"No," interrupted Catherine, "I never thought of him for a moment."

"Well, madame, you are quite right," said the old woman, "have nothing to do with red-haired men; Heaven keep you from doing so—it is the devil's own colour. But the brown, for instance, that is my colour, especially with curly hair."

Catherine blushed. Walter had curly brown hair, and Salomé saw directly that her advice was palatable; so she went on with greater enthusiasm than before—

"Curly brown hair! What a nice colour! Gentle, but quick, always ready to laugh, and good to work as well. Now look at Jacob Yaeger, the keeper, who comes every Sunday—I am sure that man walks ten or twelve leagues a day without thinking about it. One should always have a healthy husband, for good health brings good temper."

"Very likely," said Catherine absently; "no doubt

Jacob Yaeger is a gay, good sort of man; but a forester and keeper is always going about, and when one marries——”

“Ah!” said the artful Salomé, “I see you prefer the fair, and to tell the truth I cannot find fault with your taste. In the first place fair men always have tender hearts and blue eyes; poor fellows, they can see right into your thoughts. They are timid with their wives, and obedient as sheep; they are afraid of saying a cross word to you, and they have the complexion of a young girl. It would be saying a good deal to assert they are worth dark-haired men, but I believe they are even more affectionate. In fact, madame, you see it is difficult for one to make a choice between the dark and the fair; Jacob Yaeger is older than John Noblat, but good John——”

“Who said anything about John Noblat? I don’t care a bit for him.”

“But who can it be, then? Is it Zapheri Götz, the shoeing smith? Conrad Schœffer, the horse-dealer? Joseph Kroug——”

“No,” said Catherine, “none of these men please me at all.”

Then, with accents of the greatest tenderness, she raised her eyes to the ceiling, and said, with blushing cheeks—

“The man I could love, Salomé, must be a good young man, tender and rather timid, and who could love me as I could him; who would not think about money-making from morning till night; who could sing songs to me with a good voice; a poor young man, but who knows many things, and who would think me more beautiful than any one else.”

"But, madame," cried the old woman in amazement, "where in the world is there such a man to be found? There are none; such a man as you describe ought to have light hair—and wings too," added she.

"No, he is dark," said Catherine, in a low tone.

"Dark? Impossible!"

"Yes, quite possible."

"Then he must be coughing from morning till night; he must be pale and thin, probably ill."

Catherine could not help smiling.

"I was only joking," said she, rising, "and now you are taking all I have been saying to you quite seriously."

"Ah, madame, madame," said the old servant, lifting up her finger, "you don't trust me, and you are wrong; now I know who it is you love; he looks over here often enough, poor young man!"

Catherine blushed up to her ears.

"Perhaps you are mistaken, Salomé," said she.

Then, after a moment's consideration—

"And what do you think of him?"

Salomé was just going to reply when a heavy vehicle was heard to stop outside, and at the same time some one tried to open the kitchen door.

"Here is Kasper come home," said Salomé; "come, we must get the barn-doors open."

Then as she pushed back the shutter she saw the waggon full of sheaves reaching up to the first floor, throwing its shadow over the front of the inn; Kasper, Orchel, and the labourers standing by, with bare necks, their shirts open, and their breasts dripping with perspiration, waiting for the door to be opened; and the great oxen with weary eyes and legs wide apart and their shoulders up to their ears.

"Quick," cried Catherine, "run up and open the loft. I am going down into the cellar to get some wine for the men."

The house was soon astir. Everybody set to work to unload the waggon.

Outside one could hear the children at school drawling out in chorus "B—a, ba, b—e, be."

And old Salomé up in the loft, as she was taking in the sheaves, said to herself—

"Poor Walter, he little thinks what there is in store for him. Ah, that fellow may say he is lucky indeed."

CHAPTER III.



THE waggons were coming in from twelve to six; one was hardly unloaded before another arrived. It was hard work, but they had to make the most of the fine weather; the barn is the proper place for the crops, or the loft, or under a good dry shed; then it may blow, or rain, or hail, one can render thanks to the Lord for His blessings.

About seven work was over; the sheaves were stowed away like walls in the barn on both sides. Then Catherine ordered up a small cask holding seven or eight quarts, and Kasper, Orchel, Bremer, and all the men and women in their shirt-sleeves, with their cheeks, heads, and backs bathed in perspiration, came into the kitchen and refreshed themselves.

The barrel was put on the corner of the table,

glasses were soon filled and emptied; they talked about the harvest, the good quality of the grain, and the approaching vintage, which promised to be very superior.

"Come, Bremer, Kasper," said Catherine, "another glass."

Of course they wanted nothing better, for we all like to please ourselves, particularly when we can do so by only lifting one's right elbow.

It was growing dark; Salomé had just lighted the lamp, and most of the men were throwing on their jackets and preparing to leave, when Kasper turned round to his mistress, and said—

"Have you heard the great news, madame?"

"What news, Kasper?" said Catherine.

"Our schoolmaster is going to leave—the municipal council have dismissed him!"

At these words Catherine could not help blushing, and for the space of a minute she said nothing. Old Salomé was watching her in the shade, and as no one spoke Kasper continued—

"Yes, Michel Matter first told us of it on the road; and then Mother Frentzel and her two girls, who were gleaning after us; it seems they have had enough of him."

"Why," asked Catherine, "what has he done?"

Orchel, Kasper, Bremer, and the rest of them looked at one another without replying, then Bremer called out—

"Lies and nonsense! One must not believe what people say."

Catherine felt uneasy, for she saw clearly there was more to come. She went and dried her hands on the

towel behind the door, and said with an air of indifference—

“Well, and what do people say?”

Then Father Bremer took upon himself to tell her everything.

“They are going to send him away because Rebstock accuses him of looking over at this house all day long instead of attending to the school, and he says he gets up early every morning to come and stare up at your windows; but I know it is a lie.”

“Yes, it is a lie,” said Kasper, “and so is what Matter was saying.”

Catherine when she heard this grew redder than ever..

“And what has Michel Matter been saying?”

“Why, that you look at him over the garden hedge while you pretend to be cutting your cabbages, and it was time the other was packed off.”

“Ah, so they send this poor young man away because he looks this way,” said Catherine with a strange air; “they ought, then, to send me about my business too.”

“Oh, you, madame, you are the mistress of the inn.”

“Fortunately it is so,” said she—“very fortunately.”

Then there was silence for some moments, till Bremer called out—

“What a set of vagabonds there is in this world! But it is none of our business. Come, good night, all of you—good night, Catherine.”

“Wait a moment,” said the others, “we are coming with you.”

They all emptied their glasses and went away.

Catherine went up into her own room at once, and Salomé lighted the kitchen fire.

Catherine came down at night to supper and went up again directly afterwards. Kasper and Orchel went to sleep, and at ten Salomé followed them.

This is what took place that day, and you may fancy how indignant Catherine was, but her grief was nothing in comparison with Walter's despair; she was rich, she could shut her door in the face of old Rebstock, Matter, Schœffer, and the whole municipal council; but he lost his only happiness and his sole means of support at the same time and by the same blow.

The poor fellow had known it all since eleven that morning. Whilst he was looking at the children leaving school, as he often did, some of the mothers who were passing called out—

"A good journey to you, Monsieur Walter—a good journey to you."

Then they went on laughing among themselves. Several other passers-by having saluted him derisively shortly afterwards, he began to feel uneasy. And as Wendling, the mayor's secretary, was returning home after having written the application of the municipal council to the sub-prefect, with his papers under his arm, and his shoulders up under his ears, Walter stopped him for a moment to know what was the matter. The little hunchback could not help looking at him with pity, and cried in his shrill voice—

"Monsieur Walter, you are young—very young. I say no more!"

"But what have I done, Monsieur Wendling?"

"What have you been doing? Don't you know better than I?"

"In the name of Heaven what fault have I committed?"

"No, no, Monsieur Walter, you may say what you like, you ought not to be surprised; it's your own fault—you don't know what men are; I was sure some day or other the mayor would ask to have you removed."

"Have me removed?"

"Yes, it is a settled thing, the decision is come to, and I have just written to forward the council's application to the sub-prefect. I am really sorry for you—you are a good fellow; but I repeat it is your own fault; it must have happened sooner or later. Ah, 'tis love, 'tis love," &c.

And the worthy hunchback continued his walk home, making indistinct utterances, and shaking his great head with an air of profound pity.

Walter saw him disappear, and then, pale as death, returned to the schoolroom; his knees shook under him, and he had hardly strength sufficient to bolt the door, and go up into his room holding on by the banisters.

"What can I have done?" thought he. "These wretched children learn nothing, it is true, but am I to blame for it? If the council sends me away, I am ruined; a teacher once dismissed at the application of a municipal council can never hope for another appointment."

These were Walter's reflections; he could see himself discharged, and returning to Hirschland to his infirm old father, whom he had been in the habit of assisting, and who would henceforth be obliged to live in misery; for to handle an axe, or saw trunks of trees, or split logs, he felt himself incapable—he was too weak for such rough work.

"What can I do?" muttered he, walking up and down his room in despair.

He thought he would go and see the mayor, or his deputy, or the inspector, and prove his innocence; and it was only very late, about ten, that he made up his mind to go and call upon the curé Dimories the next day before morning service, and ask him to intercede in his favour.

"Yes," thought he, "that is the best course to pursue; they will listen to the curé, and they may perhaps see the injustice of their hasty resolution. It is only right they should hear what I have to say; according to the regulations they are bound to do so."

He was sitting with his elbows on the table, and his head on his hands; notwithstanding his trust in the curé, a feeling of despair came over him.

Until that moment all his enjoyment in this world had been to look at Catherine and fancy he could see her moving about the inn, or in her own little room, or in the yard among her chickens, looking always smiling and gay. A presentiment warned him that all his troubles came from thence, but he had not sufficient strength of mind to regret his love for her—it was a sort of consolation to him in the midst of his troubles.

His mind was filled with the figures of old Rebstock, Michel Matter, and the rest of them who used to come to the inn every Sunday under the pretext of having a glass of wine, and then for the first time did it occur to him that they were all suitors for Catherine's hand; then he understood the meaning of the last words of Wendling the clerk, and cursed his unlucky destiny; he thought he should like to run across to Catherine and exclaim, "I love you too! They send me away be-

cause I love you—a look from you is sufficient for my happiness—let them take your land, your vineyards, all your worldly goods, and leave me my only happiness! The wretches! I am sure they do not love you for yourself as I do!”

And he leaned on the table, with his face buried in his hands, and burst into tears.

“No,” he murmured, “not one of them cares for her as I do, and she must prefer the man who loves her best.”

But again, when he reflected on his destitute condition, how he was crushed down by the rich men’s contempt, how ridiculous he must look in his ragged cloak and battered hat, he felt, as it were, annihilated.

He remained a long time in this desolate state opposite the lamp, meditating on the insolence, joy, and riches of those who have no heart to feel either shame or tenderness, and who do not hesitate to take whatever delights them without asking themselves the question whether they deserve it, and without any uneasiness as to the despair of other people.


“Happy,” he thought, “are they who have no souls, who are born without sense of shame; those are the earth’s masters; for them all things were created, while others want but a single flower to be happy! The others gather it, and there is no more said. Should any one offer them any hindrance, they wrongfully accuse him, cause him to be driven like a beggar from the place; all the villains are on their side, and they form the majority.”

Now, while Walter was thus weeping and lamenting, Catherine, who had just put out her candle that she might not be seen, was watching him from the little

window opposite; she saw the looks of despair he gave towards the inn, and divining the feeling of tenderness for her which possessed poor Walter's heart, she loved him the more for it, and while she pitied him she felt happy in such love.

At last, after a long reverie, Walter, recollecting he must be with the curé early on the following morning, got up, put out his lamp, and went to bed. But we can believe he did not sleep much, and that his troubles presented themselves afresh in his broken slumbers.

CHAPTER IV.

HE next day happened to be Sunday, and all the regular frequenters of the Carp walked one after the other into the kitchen as usual, dressed in square-cut coats, red waistcoats, woollen stockings, and cocked hats on their heads, or grey or black beavers. They looked right and left for Catherine to pay their compliments to her, but she was not there. Kasper, in his shirt-sleeves, with his pipe in his mouth, was skinning a hare, hung up by its hind legs to the yard door, and old Salomé at the sink was scouring her pots and pans.

"Ah, ha!" they began, "what is going on this morning, Salomé? Is Mademoiselle Catherine ill, that we have not the pleasure of seeing her?"

Salomé, without even taking the trouble to turn round, replied—

"Ill? he! he! he! I believe not! No, Monsieur

Yaeger; no, Monsieur Matter; thank God, she is as well as you or I; the dear child, she never was better! Kasper, some white wine for Monsieur Yaeger."

So they went into the public room very perplexed, and sat down to their wine. Some talked about the schoolmaster's discomfiture, others played at cards; but they did not bring them down with their usual noise on the table, and seemed somewhat uneasy.

At last, about nine, Catherine came lightly downstairs. She had put on her short poppy-coloured skirt, pretty sky-blue jacket, and her little velvet cap, embroidered in gold, with long moiré ribbons. Catherine had not closed her eyes all night; many a time she turned about in her bed, not knowing what line of conduct to adopt; but now she had resolved what course to pursue, and all her natural gaiety had returned; she never looked so fresh, lively, and animated.

"Salomé," she said, "you must get a nice little dinner ready; there will be some one to dinner—I am going out now. I have something to do. You understand me?"

"Yes, madame," replied the old servant, with a smile which expressed a great deal; "you may depend upon me; your guests will be pleased enough."

At that moment Rebstock entered the kitchen.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle Catherine," cried he, opening his mouth wide; "how fine you are this morning!"

"Do you think so, Monsieur Rebstock?"

"Yes, Catherine, I do indeed!"

"Well, I am very glad to hear you say so! You

see, Monsieur Rebstock, I want to please some one to-day."

"You want to please some one? And who may it be?"

"Ah! that is my secret! You will know it by-and-by."

Then she turned her back on the vine-dresser, and went into the alley which led to the street.

Poor Heinrich Walter, in his long and ragged black coat, and his little cocked hat under his arm, had just come out of the school to betake himself to his friend Dimones, the curé.

Catherine called out to him, as he went down the steps of the house, with her pleasant voice—

"Monsieur Walter, Monsieur Walter!"

When he saw the woman he loved so much he turned pale, and his hand remained on the latch.

"Monsieur Walter," said Catherine, with a smile, "let us go inside if you please—I want to speak to you."

Walter was so struck that he could not find words to reply, but turned the key in the lock in silence. Catherine walked in, followed by the poor fellow, who could hardly keep his legs.

This is what the astonished suitors of Catherine beheld while flattening their noses against the inn windows, and now this is what took place in the school-room.

Catherine was very red; some courage had been requisite to take such a step, but one could see by the brightness of her eyes she was very well satisfied all the same. Walter was leaning against the desk, pale as death; he dared not look at her; he was hot and cold and could not divine what brought her there.

"Monsieur Walter," said Catherine, looking just a little serious, "I have a great complaint to make of you."

"Of me, mademoiselle!" the schoolmaster began, quite alarmed.

"Yes, Monsieur Walter; your imprudent conduct has exposed me to blame; for more than a year you have been looking constantly at the inn—everybody is talking about it. Yesterday one heard of nothing else but that in the village."

"Oh! forgive me!" said the poor fellow, clasping his hands; "yes, I confess I ought to have remembered that a schoolmaster—but I could not help it, mademoiselle. I was so lonely, so unhappy—my position is a sad one—that if I only saw you an instant in the morning it was a joy to me for the whole day. I little thought that could do you any harm. Good God! I am punished for it enough, for they have dismissed me—for I must leave this."

He began to sob, and big bright tears trickled down his pale cheeks.

Catherine, whose heart was melting in her bosom when she saw him in this state, continued—

"But, Monsieur Walter, I am not more cruel than others. I do not desire the death of a sinner—we are all weak! But if I forgive you, if I forget, what will you do to make amends?"

"I will set off at once," piteously cried the schoolmaster—"yes, if it should cost me my life, I will leave the village for ever, and you shall never hear my name again."

"And do you think, Monsieur Walter, that is the



"Monsieur Walter, I have a great complaint to make of you."

best way to atone for what you have done? Do you think your departure hence will put a stop to evil speaking?"

"But," cried he, at his wits' end, "what would you have me do, then?"

"What should you do? Indeed it is not for me to teach you; but, since you compel me, Monsieur Walter, I may as well tell you—when a respectable man compromises a young girl he does not run away, but he asks her to marry him."

The poor fellow, thinking his ears deceived him, looked up in her face; but when he saw Catherine smiling sweetly at him, her eyes beaming with tenderness, he felt all the joys of heaven take possession of his soul.

It was given to Walter to experience the greatest felicity man can know on this earth, when, without being aware how it came about, he pressed Catherine to his heart and their lips met in a first kiss. In comparison with such happiness as this, let me tell you all others are of small account, and if any one asserts the contrary, believe me, he is really to be pitied; for the good and merciful God created love for His children. Did He not say to them—"Love one another! increase and multiply! replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowls of the air, and over every living thing?" Now, since God has seen that it is good, what man can be so senseless as to find it bad?

Walter and Catherine had remained in that attitude for more than a minute, looking into each other's hearts, and thinking of naught else but the pleasure of

doing so, when a shadow in the window startled them, and, raising their eyes, they saw all their friends from the *Carp* watching them with long noses under their great cocked hats, and eyes as round as if they saw a ghost.

"Ah, ha!" cried old *Rebstock* in a hoarse voice, tapping with his finger against the glass, "this, then, is how *Mademoiselle Catherine Koenig* conducts herself!"

Catherine was a little put out at first, but recovered herself immediately and opened the window.

"Yes, *Monsieur Rebstock*," she said, laughing heartily, "this is the surprise I had in store for you—this is just the reason why I was so fine this morning; I wanted to please *Monsieur Walter*; he has been deprived of his little place through your ill-nature, and I shall give him a much better one instead."

And as no one had any answer ready, but all looked dumbfounded, *Walter* and *Catherine* walked out of the schoolroom arm-in-arm, and crossed the street. They looked so radiant with happiness that one might have said the sun was shining upon them alone.

In this fashion they entered the inn, and as the old servant looked wonderingly at them—

"*Salomé*," said *Catherine* joyously, "here is the master! We are going to tell the *curé* to publish the banns, and then we shall come home to dinner; mind it is a good one."

I might spin out a long story about the happiness of *Catherine* and *Walter*, but any sensible person can understand it. Three weeks afterwards they were married; the mayor, *Monsieur Rebstock*, was unwell

that day, but his deputy, Baumgarten, fulfilled his functions for him. Not one of Catherine's suitors was present at the ceremony, which, however, did not the least abate the gaiety of the wedding, nor prevent the guests from drinking to the prosperity of the newly-married couple. I leave you to guess whether the old Rangen and Drahenfeltz wines did not flow abundantly under these circumstances.





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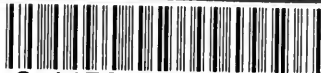
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